

APPROACH TO GOD

Swami Paratparananda

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THERE is a conception that unless there is awe and fear and the concomitant feelings of submission and servitude, God cannot be approached or worshipped. While it is a fact that this attitude may be one of the approaches to God, it does not necessarily follow that it is the only approach. An everyday and every man's experience in the world should throw some light upon this statement. Whom do we remember most? Those whom we fear or love? Who does command our submission, non-acquisitioned and spontaneous, earliest; one who tyrannizes or one who loves? The only answer can be those whom we love. In fear the burden of submission is irksome, always, and is a compulsion that is sought to be overthrown the moment the subject feels himself strong enough to do so, or to flout it. But in affection, in love, man does not feel it though it may weigh down upon him. There is no groaning under its weight; there is not even the grumbling. Rather, there is a spontaneous joy in such submission. In worship or approach to God also this same rule is applicable. In fact man's feelings, being what they are, cannot be multiplied in number; no fresh type of faculties can be created but they can be extended, expanded, sublimated. And that is what happens in our approach to God. You are not asked to be bereft of your feelings or create new ones but only to turn them Godwards.

Now, what infuses awe or fear into us? Is it not the immensity of the powers or glory of God? And also a feeling of alienation from Him when we do not consider Him as our own? 'It is those who love glory themselves that think much about the glory of God,' says Sri Ramakrishna. Why should we be overwhelmed with His glory? Perhaps, there is a desire for worldly things and glory lurking in ourselves that makes us do so. Perhaps, we want to bargain with Him for some of His glory. This does not, however, mean that one should not appreciate a beautiful scenery or a serene and soul-elevating place or circumstance. But to think of His glory and forget Him is not an aspirant's way. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'What will you gain by counting the trees and branches and leaves in a mango grove? You have come to eat mangoes. Eat them and be happy'. What will it avail us if we come to know what all are the powers of God? And is it possible to know all? On the other hand, if we realize God, see Him, talk with Him that will liberate us, make us free. And this freedom is not something like that what we see in the world, momentary and conditioned. It is eternal and unconditioned. It makes us soar beyond the plane of mundane consciousness. It enwraps us in a divine and eternal light, makes us free from fear, free from inhibitions, free of likes and dislikes, free from attachment and

hatred. Is not such a state covetable? Worship of God helps us reach this state. Nothing else can.

There is a Sanskrit verse by the poet Bhartrhari which runs thus: 'In enjoyment there is the fear of disease; in social position, the fear of falling off; in wealth, the fear of kings; in honour, the fear of humiliation; in power, the fear of the foes; in beauty, the fear of old age; in scriptural erudition, the fear of antagonists; in virtue, the fear of calumniators; in body, the fear of death. All things of this world pertaining to man are attended with fear; renunciation alone stands for fearlessness.'¹ We may add that when this renunciation leads to God-realization it opens the flood-gates of bliss eternal leaving no room for the baser motives and fear to assert themselves. That is why one who has touched the source of Truth, of Light wavers not in his path; fears nothing. He stands like the adamant rocks which though battered by the waves remain unmoved, undented. Tribulations and trials, miseries and afflictions leave him unperturbed. When we realize God we know Him to be our own, the Soul of our souls, our inmost Being. Can we then call it servitude or submission in the sense we understand worldly servitude? To whom do we submit? Is it not to our own inner Being? Could there be any harm in that? What is more welcome than that we conquer our baser impulses, the turbulent passions, and the still stronger ego and submitting to the Indwelling spirit be at peace with ourself and the whole world? And if worship of God does it, as assured by God-men and men of God, why should we stand away?

All the objections to worship of God seem to arise from the conception that He is an extra-cosmic Being, sitting somewhere in the Heaven, high above the clouds, demanding implicit submission under threats of dire consequences, holding out bouquets and enjoyments to those who follow His commands and punishment of hell fire to those who transgress. But the Hindu view of God — that He is the Indwelling Spirit of every being and at the same time transcends them all — is a very encouraging one. Here the distance between the soul and the Oversoul shrinks, as it were, to an appreciable extent. The strangeness, man at first feels towards God, drops off yielding place to a feeling of appurtenance, belonging. The sages and saints experienced this; the Upanisads declare it: The *Chāndogya*, for instance, points out 'that Purusa which is seen in the eye that is the Ātman'.²

Bādarāyana in his Śārīrika Sūtras removes the apparent ambiguity about the meaning of this passage — whether it refers to the Jīva or the Paramātmā — by two aphorisms: 'The one within (is the paramatman); on account of His qualities being declared'.³ A second passage which refers to the "within" occurs in the same Upanisad (I. vi. 6) wherein the description of that Being, in the orb of the sun, is given.⁴ An objection was raised that this description cannot pertain to the Paramātmā — He being without form — and therefore must only be of the *jīva*, or the deity representing the sun. This contention is, however, refuted. The highest Lord though without form assumes forms to bestow grace on the *sādhaka* by His own power, Māyā.⁵ Why does this become necessary? It is well-known that all

¹ Vairagyasatakam, 31.

² Chandogya Upanisad, VIII.vii.4.

³ Brahma Sūtras, I.i.20.

⁴ Chandogya, I.vi.6.

⁵ Quoted by Sri Samkara in his commentary on Br. Sūtra Bhashya, I.i.20.

individuals have not the same capacity of comprehension. Our sages too knew it. So, for such of those who cannot or do not like to think in terms of the formless aspect of God, the forms and qualities are declared.

Any further doubt lingering in one's mind is removed by the next aphorism: 'And there is another one (i.e. the Paramātmān, who is different from the individual souls animating the sun etc.); on account of the distinction being declared.'⁶ Where is this distinction proclaimed? The *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* gives the answer. It is not the deity representing the sun that is meant while referring to the One inside its orb, but the 'One who dwells in the sun, but is within it, whom the sun does not know, whose body is the sun, and who controls the sun from within, that One is the Internal Ruler, your own immortal Self'.⁷

Śruti is never tired of repeating its statements to drive home the truths. It repeats this formula in the case of all elements, all beings, all limbs of man, and his mind and his knowledge. Here we see how close we are to God and yet we know Him not, comprehend Him not. Sri Ramakrishna used to give the simile of the musk-deer. The deer would smell the fragrance of the musk but not knowing that the source of the fragrance was in its own navel, would run to all quarters of the forest and at last when tired would lie down and then come to know that what it has been seeking outside in vain was all the time within itself.

Now a question would arise: 'If we are controlled by a higher power residing in us, in what way are we responsible for our actions?' Such a question was put to Sri Ramakrishna also. And that question will be repeated for ages to come, by people who would want to shift the responsibility of their wicked deeds on to someone else. Actually, they do not believe it when they repeat that it is the Indwelling Spirit who is working through them. It is only a veil to hoodwink others. In the heart of their hearts they know that they are far far away from believing it themselves. They assert their ego most of the time. 'Well', you may say, 'yours is a strange logic indeed! You breathe hot and cold at the same time. Once you say that every thing is controlled by the Inner Ruler and again you say that the ego asserts. Then, what type of a ruler is that who cannot resist the force of the ego?' To this we reply, 'True, it seems very incompatible. But haven't you seen a mother, with her benevolence and beneficence, though guiding the steps and conduct of her child, giving way to its unreasonable importunities? Aye, she even sometimes allows the child to burn its fingers in fire though she could, if she would, prevent it in the interest of the child. But then she would take care of it again as soon as it has done with its play, learnt its lessons. For all that, can you insist that the mother was not strong enough to restrain the child? No. Likewise the Inner Ruler (*antaryāmin*) is not a despot. You are given a little free play to use your faculties, to pick your own way, learn your lessons yourselves in the world, when you would not listen to the sane advice that is pouring forth from your own Inner Being. He even allows you the freedom to deny Him. But there it ends, your ego comes into clash with those of others if you will assert it too much. Then you fall back for support on God, on your Inner Being. Where then is the inconsistency in what we have said?' This much about those who would say that they have their free will.

⁶ Br. Sūtras, I.i.21.

⁷ Br. Up. 3.7.9.

A little digression here is inevitable as the subject of free will has been introduced. Is our will free? The answer is yes and no. We can approach this reply from two standpoints. First of all, as related already, a certain amount of freedom is given to us, just as a cow tethered to a post is allowed to roam about, in a meadow, to the extent the length of the rope round its neck allows it, but no more. We can feel this even in society. Society gives us freedom to develop in our own individual way, of course, subject to certain restrictions. And when we go beyond the set bounds, down comes its mighty arm. The long arm of the law seizes one who transgresses its limits, or enters into others' domains. However much we may like to break these bonds they would not yield, but only chafe us the more. We are not in any way in a dissimilar position as far as 'will to act' is concerned. So many factors press us down: our inherent tendencies, circumstances, environments and the like.

From the second point of view, as long as our will remains distinct from the Cosmic Will it is not free, but when the former runs in concurrence with the latter it has no more bonds. Whatever it wills comes true, for it can have no desire apart from that of the Cosmic Will. Of course, this latter state is possible only when man has attained complete perfection, when not a speck of worldly taint is left in him.

To return to the subject of submission: what about those who simulate submission accepting the existence of a Higher Entity ruling over us? It is a dangerous game they try to play. They are deceiving themselves. Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the Brahmin — who killed a cow and who while taking credit for the lay out of his garden and every good and beautiful thing he possessed, imputed the sin of cow-killing to Indra, the presiding deity of the hand — should serve as a very poignant eye-opener. Another example Sri Ramakrishna used to cite was that of Duryodhana. Duryodhana said to Sri Krishna: 'I know what is righteousness but I have no inclination to practise it, and I know what is unrighteousness but I have no disposition to avoid it. O Krishna, I act as you, dwelling in my heart, make me act.' Sri Ramakrishna says that such lip service won't do us any good: 'You know in your heart of hearts that those are mere words. No sooner do you commit an evil deed than you feel a palpitation in your heart.' Again he said, be one in your thought, word and deed. For sincerity is the *sine qua non* of spiritual life. A man with a sincere trust in God does not come to grief. 'If you place your trust in a great man he won't let you down. What then to speak of the Lord!' remarks Sri Ramakrishna.

Having said that awe and fear, submission and servitude need not be the only approach to God it devolves on us to point out what other approaches are feasible. We shall leave out the Vedantic idea of 'Atman is Brahman', as it is not a practicable proposition in the case of all and sundry. Worship implies three things, the worshipper, the worshipped and the act of worship. Let us recall what we said earlier, viz. that God assumes forms for bestowing grace on the aspirant. Everything will be easier to comprehend if we remember this. Now, to God with form, the other forms of approach would be respect, reverence and love. The last one is an intimate relation. We are not devoid of these feelings. We respect and revere those who are good and great, who possess virtues in abundance, and who are pure. Man loves his father, mother, wife, and children. The approach of the Vaisnavas is somewhat on this line, and can be followed with profit. There are no conventionalities to be observed, no restrictions to be feared in man's approach to these relations. Man feels

one with them. That is the reason why man turns to his home after a hard day's labour or a nerve-racking experience, for rest and sympathy. He is sure of the soothing touch of the beloved ones there. It restores him to cheerfulness, gives him courage to face life again, however terrible a form it may assume.

But very rarely do people come across disinterested love in the world. It is all give and take, a shop-keeping, that is why there is so much of unrest in families. Perhaps, man's love towards God begins that way. He will worship God to get some of his desires fulfilled. In other words, his devotion is *sakāma*. If, however, the aspirant uses his discrimination he will soon understand the emptiness of the enjoyments. Love of God rightly directed is able to generate in us dispassion for these enjoyments. That is the test of the dawn of real love of God. Nothing tempts a man, who has that love, to fall from the ideal. It is love of God for His own sake, not for the sake of 'loaves and fishes'.

Man is obsessed with the idea that every thing should be judged by his own standard. He wants to weigh God also in his own moral balance. This shows how anthropomorphic an ordinary man's idea of God is. Nay, even great theologians and scholars commit this mistake. They superimpose their own imperfections, disabilities and drawbacks, on the Lord, and posit that such a being does not deserve any worship. But a little thought would satisfy that it is puerile to speak of good and evil in the transcendent. We will bring down the transcendent Lord to the level of man, if we try to impose on Him our standards, of morals and the like. Morals and laws are necessary in a world of multiplicity where there is a conflict between interests. But God is one who has no axe of His own to grind, who has no pleasures to seek and is on a plane where there is no multiplicity, no interests to clash. He is ever pure, ever perfect, ever knowing, and ever free. He desires nothing, wills nothing. If such a Being does not deserve worship who else will? Man, wherever he finds greater powers, greater talents and greater virtues instinctively bows down his head in salutation. Then why should he be arrogant towards the highest Being, who is the fulfillment of all virtues and power and glory?

LORD BUDDHA AND HIS MIDDLE PATH

Swami Paratparananda

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THE life of Gautama, the Buddha is a beacon that has been shedding light undimmed for two and a half millenniums now, informing, inspiring and illuminating people, and will continue to do so till man values more something higher than the things of the mundane world, till man cares even a little for a righteous kind of life, till man loves to live a peaceful life, nay till man exists. For it was a life of sacrifice intensely lived, in which there was no disparity between the things spoken and things done. It was a life which knew no fear, made no distinction between the high and the low.

Buddha did not lay much stress on the abstruse metaphysical side of philosophy. Perhaps, he thought he should give a practical demonstration of a good life for ages to come than dwell on mere speculation. This trend of his thought is discernible in his reply to the question regarding the existence of the soul. He asks: 'Will you, if you find a man pierced with an arrow, first try to investigate by what hunter it was shot, of what poison it was tipped and so on indefinitely or relieve the sufferer of his miseries by extracting the arrow out and applying soothing balms to the wound?' 'Man' he seems to say, 'is burning in the miseries of this world, show him the path out of it and leave alone all other dry discussions.' His life, therefore, as a most rational one appeals to one and all, starting with the unbelievers, the agnostics and the atheists up to the trustful and the religious. Whatever doctrinal differences, may there have been or still be between his followers and those of other faiths, it cannot be denied that his life has still a charm which thrills people, moves them to the core of their very being. It almost resembles a lyrical song taking you along its current of melodies, now making you see into the depths of despair at his struggle, now lifting you up, on to the crest of joy at his enlightenment, now moving you to tears at the readiness of the Blessed One to sacrifice his life to save that of a lamb, and again making you stand in awe at the sternness in his desire of maintaining the purity of his creed, free of all miracle-mongering.

What pity and compassion must have flowed in those veins, what intense sufferings should have been felt in that heart to be moved so! Here we find the ununderstandable Upanisadic saying, (*sarvam khalvidam brahma*) "all this is verily Brahman," being literally lived and that not as a practice, but spontaneously as a result of the realization of the Unity of Being.

II

Now let us make a brief survey of his life, a detailed one being beyond our scope at present. Most of the accounts of Buddha's life that we get is from *Lalitavistara* and such other Pali Canons.

The Buddha is the name by which Siddhartha, the Gautama, was known after his enlightenment. He was born in the year 563 B.C. to the provincial king Suddhodana and his queen Maya, of Kapilavasthu, a township in the plains near the foot-hills of Nepal. Foretold, that his son when grown to manhood would either become a powerful king or moved by the woes of the world turn a religious leader, king Suddhodana in order to avoid the latter tragedy, as he considered it, brought up his son away from the three woes of the world: disease, old age and death. When Siddhartha grew into manhood, the father desiring to bind him securely to wealth and kingdom, had him married to a girl of his choice, named Yasodhara, beautiful and loving and virtuous. They had a lovely child who was named Rahula. Suddhodana was now feeling a little secure as he thought the responsibility of the family and love for his wife and child would hold Siddhartha back.

The wheel of time rolled on. Meanwhile, destiny seemed to have been laughing in its sleeves when the king was endeavouring, vainly, to entangle Siddhartha in the world. Siddhartha, now, desirous to know his people set forth from his palace in his chariot. And as if Providence was lying in wait, just for this moment, to strike and strike hard to shock into rude awakingness Siddhartha's consciousness, which was till then kept in the dark about the real state of affairs of the world. He came across the very three phenomena which the king had all the time kept away from his son. He saw on his way an old man, bent double, made feeble by ravages of time, dragging his burden of the body with great effort. He learnt from his charioteer that that was the way of all mankind, that this same old man was once a joyous, sportive youth but that time had worked its way and reduced him to that state. Then he saw a palsied man, with some fingers of his hands missing, lying on the road side writhing in pain. To Siddhartha's feeling inquiry regarding the man Channa, the Charioteer, explained that the man was stricken with disease. Disease he said comes to human beings in several forms but none knew how. Then Siddhartha came face to face with a dead body being carried on the hearse. To Siddhartha's enquiring glance Channa said that was the end of all human beings; that those who were born had to die one day. Each of these sights had thrown Siddhartha into deeper and deeper contemplation. He was sad. Was there no way out of these triple woes? thought he. As if to show him the way he next met a Sannyasin, serene and self-possessed and dignified, carrying a beggar's bowl. Siddhartha was impressed and asked Channa who that person might be who could be so calm, and learnt that it was a monk who had 'abandoned all longings and led a life of austerity and lived without passion or envy and begged his daily food'. Siddhartha mused within himself, "well, that seems to be the course of life set for me"; "to become religious has ever been praised by the wise and this shall be my refuge and the refuge of others and shall yield the

fruit of life, and immortality!"

He drove back to the palace brooding, unheeding of anything, and when the palace was plunged in the calmness of the night his resolve was made. Bidding farewell to his sleeping wife and child Siddhartha rode forth followed by Channa till he had covered a great distance and then putting off his royal robes and jewels, sent Channa back to the palace and himself went into homelessness. He had then reached the age of twenty-nine.

His first encounter after this great renunciation was with the king of Magadha, Bimbisara. Siddhartha who had gone on his begging round into the city of Rajagriha had attracted attention of the people. When the king came to know of it he went to the place where Siddhartha was and impressed by the beauty of his person and nobility of his bearing, offered to bestow upon him the whole kingdom. Siddhartha refused to have anything to do with the worldly empire but promised the king to teach him his way when he had found it.

From here he proceeded to the hermitage of Ālāra Kālāma, a renowned teacher of the time, and became his disciple and learnt the art of meditation from him. But not satisfied with the metaphysical part of his teachings he retired to a forest and practised austerities, of fasting and mortification, for years until his body was like a withered branch. At the end of six years he considered the state of his mind sitting under a Jambu tree. Mortification had weakened his body and yet he was not in sight of enlightenment. He thought of abandoning the path of fasting and went and bathed in a river but he was so weak that he could not rise from the stream. With great effort he struggled out but on the way to his abode he fell down in a swoon. His companions, the five monks, thought he was dead. But he revived and then he resolved to beg his food, that his health and strength may be restored. Seeing that Siddhartha had broken his fast without attaining enlightenment the monks left him. Now, the daughter of the village headman of Uruvela where Siddhartha was practising his austerities had desired that the great Sakya Muni would deign to receive food from her.

So on the day he was to attain enlightenment she had a pre-vision. She, therefore, carried a bowl of thickened milk cooked with rice and offered it to the Great One. Siddhartha took the bowl, went to the river, took his bath and having partaken of the food and refreshed his limbs made the greatest resolve: 'Let my body dry up, my skin and my nerves and my bones waste away, yet this body will not move from this seat until I have attained Supreme Enlightenment, which is difficult of attainment even after aeons.' Various were the temptations that came to him at that time, yet he overcame them all and as the dawn approached Siddhartha attained to Supreme Enlightenment, became the Buddha.

It is said that the Blessed One remained in that state for 49 days enjoying the bliss of emancipation. On the forty-ninth day two merchants who were passing by saw his majestic figure full of peace and were moved to make an offering of food to the Blessed One. The Buddha accepted their offering and pointed out to them the way of salvation and they became his first lay disciples.

Now the Buddha deeply pondered whether he should teach what he had

realized. For he thought the worldlings will not understand the truth because their happiness was in bodily enjoyments. Yet he felt an inner urge that the Truth so dearly earned should not be lost. And then he remembered his five disciples and coming to know that they were living at Isipatana near Banaras he wended his way there. The monks saw their former master approach but resolved not to show him any respect, as he had broken his vow of fasting. But as the Blessed One approached them they involuntarily rose from their seats in spite of their resolution, bowed down to him and offered him a seat and he taught them. That was his first sermon. To them he taught the ineffectiveness of useless austerities and exhorted them to follow the middle path which he had discovered.

By now he had already a good number of monks in his retinue. From Banaras he went to Rajagriha, to King Bimbisara, and received him into his fold, and preached his Dharma. From Rajagriha the Buddha made for Kapilavasthu being invited by his father. There he converted the Sākya Princes to his Dharma and received his son Rahula—who taught by his mother Yaśodhara, had claimed his patrimony — into the Order. Much later at Vesali he decided to admit women into the Order at the prayer of Ānanda who had witnessed a group of earnest women, sore of foot due to walking, and laden with dust, had come to beg of the Tathagata to be ordained as nuns.

For forty-five years the Blessed One travelled, preached and taught the way to salvation. He had now 1200 disciples who were monks. He had a great following among the lay men and women too. Now, when he was full of years (he was then eighty) and his mission was fulfilled the Blessed One proceeded to Pāra where he accepted the hospitality of Canda, a smith. But the Buddha was attacked by a fell disease soon after he partook of the meal offered by Canda and was in great pain. Yet, mindful and self-possessed the Buddha bore it without complaint. He then proceeded to Kusinara and halted in a Sāla grove. Growing weary he asked Ananda, his disciple and attendant, to spread his couch between two Sāla trees and lay down on his right side.

And as the last moments drew near lo, a seeker came and wanted to be taught and he approached Ananda. But Ananda refused permission to allow him to go to the Blessed One, knowing that the Master was weary and was not to be troubled. However, Buddha who overheard their conversation and knowing that the seeker was sincere caused the man to be brought and dissipated all his doubts. Thus did the Buddha teach every sincere seeker till the last breath of his life. The Blessed One's last exhortation to the Brethren was: "Decay is inherent in all component things. Work out your salvation with diligence."

III

Now we come to the teachings of the Buddha of which we shall discuss here only about the middle path. A lot of confusion has arisen in the interpreting of this path and passage of time has not helped to remove these misunderstandings. Rather people were and are still not in a mood to break the

cherished images of their own interpretation of these teachings. People are apt to forget that a great spiritual Master's exhortations cannot be construed properly except in the light of his own life. Secondly, we have also to consider the times in which the Master lived and the context in which he spoke the particular words.

We have, as it has come down to us in translation, the Blessed One's teachings on the middle path as follows:

"The Tathagata," said the Buddha, "does not seek salvation *in* austerities, but neither does he for that reason indulge in worldly pleasures, nor live in abundance. The Tathagata has found the middle path.

"There are two extremes, O monks, which the man who has given up the world ought not to follow — habitual practice, on the one hand, of self-indulgence which is unworthy, vain and fit only for the worldly-minded; and the *habitual* practice, on the other hand, of self-mortification, which is painful, useless and unprofitable"¹

The Buddha continues:

"By suffering, the emaciated devotee produces confusion and sickly thoughts in his mind. Mortification is not conducive even to worldly knowledge; how much less to a triumph over the senses!"²

First of all, we have to understand that fasting and mortification of the flesh was considered at that time *the* way to salvation. If we recollect what has been said earlier we shall find that the Buddha gave his first sermon to his disciples who had deserted him when he took to begging after being faint with fasting and mortification. The impression of the disciples that he had broken his vow by taking food and was no more a Muni but a man of the world was so great that when they saw him after his enlightenment they addressed him as "Brother", as an equal, and not as their Master. This false notion was to be counter-acted. For the Buddha had come as a saviour and he could not but drive out false notions that were prevalent in his time, to save religion from total annihilation. He had to speak the truth and in forceful language too, fitting the occasion that it demanded. Again, mortification was not the goal of man, whereas people of those times saw salvation only in it. Mortifications were, if anything, only the means. Was not then the goal forgotten in vaingloriousness of austerity? That is why the Buddha exhorts how difficult it is to triumph over the senses by mere austerity, which makes man weak and unable to know even the ordinary things of life. Who was a better authority of what is conducive to salvation than the one who had attained enlightenment himself? But the Buddha warns, those who may swing to the other extreme, "Sensuality is enervating; the self-indulgent man is slave to his passions, and pleasure seeking is degrading and vulgar". Yet he does not want to leave undefined what he has got to say about his middle path. So he continues: "But to satisfy the necessities of life is not evil. To keep the body in good health is a duty, for otherwise we shall not be able to trim the lamp of wisdom, and keep our mind strong and

¹ Gospel of Buddhism by Paul Carus, PP. 41 and 42. Pub: The Publication Department, Government of India, Delhi.

² Ibidem

clear.

“This is the middle path that keeps aloof from the extremes.”³

Those who stop with the Tathagatha’s instructions regarding austerity and follow not his later injunctions are in a graver danger of losing their foothold on the spiritual path than the others. This is to be remembered by all aspirants. Further, we have to consider the meaning of every word of his sayings quoted above. There is the word "*habitual*" qualifying practice of austerities, which we have put in italics, to show that it is not at all against the injunctions of the Buddha to observe fasts and vigils, occasionally without injuring the body. The idea behind the Tathagatha’s instructions is clear and unambiguous and should not be twisted to suit our needs. Lest people should be led away by his denunciation of austerities the Buddha remarks: “Let him be moderate, let him eat and drink according to the needs of the body.” The “needs of the body” again may be a dangerous term. For in the present times our needs have a tendency of increasing in a telescopic manner. But our ancient idea was, as Swami Vivekananda puts it, ‘with how little can we keep the body trim and not with how much can we be content’.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* too gives an almost identical teaching: “Yoga cannot be practised by one who indulges in eating nor by one who completely abstains from food; neither can it be practised by one given to too much sleep nor by one who wakes up all the time. To one who is moderate in his food and rest, moderate in his physical exertions, moderate in sleep and wakefulness yoga becomes easy of practice and a dispeller of miseries.”⁴ Of course, this does not mean there is no stage when man can abstain from food. The Buddha, himself, if we have to believe in tradition, was without any food for 49 days after his enlightenment, immersed in the joy of that bliss. In our own times Sri Ramakrishna lived in that state for six months without being aware, of what went on round him, even of his body. Providentially, however, a wandering monk who happened to come to Dakshineswar at that time and comprehended the real state through which Sri Ramakrishna was passing, administered food unto him sometimes even by beating Sri Ramakrishna's person to bring his mind down to the normal plane. But these are exceptional cases where illumination had been attained first. Perhaps, the needs of the body are not so exacting in that state as when man is on the normal plane. But for all others who are still aspirants the middle path prescribed by the *Gītā*, reinforced by the Buddha and reiterated by Sri Ramakrishna is the safest guide.

Sri Ramakrishna, when he was told that a certain person had given up fish and betel leaf, is said to have remarked, ‘What has poor betel leaf and fish done? Let him give up lust and gold’. The meaning is, that lust and avarice are the two greatest impediments on the spiritual path. If one performs austerities and yet retains longings for enjoyment here or hereafter he will not be able to attain salvation. Let us not jump to any conclusion without understanding the purport of this teaching. Observe how like a hawk Sri Ramakrishna kept his watchful eyes on his disciples. Sri Ramakrishna was very particular even as to

³ Ibidem

⁴ Bhagavad Gita, VI, 16 & 17.

what food, and how much of it each of his boy-disciples took, and never failed to reprimand them if it was more than the needs of the body of the particular individual. That is the middle path which the Buddha also taught. Let us remember this always and be not led astray either way.

THE FOUR-FOLD BONDAGE AND RELEASE THEREFROM

Swami Paratparananda

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THE average man's life on earth is a hopeless dependence on circumstances. He has several masters to serve: those under whom he works, those to whom he owes obligations, his own passions and lastly the ego. Among these, the passions are the worst tyrants; they exact out of him all his energy and they will not leave him at that but would continue to torment him. Man's senses are at the root of all passions; the eyes hanker after beautiful objects, the ear after sweet sounds and so on and these senses are never satisfied. They appear to be pleased for a time, but there is no appeasing them. Without any compunction they repeat their demands. Their hunger is enormous. They make man work like a bond-slave, like the bullock that is tied to the yoke of the native oil mill. Tantalized by the wisp of grass that hangs before it, the bullock, in order to reach that coveted piece of food, grinds the mill day in and day out, but never gets the promised delicacy. Likewise, man expecting happiness grinds this mill of the world as a slave. But the pity of it is, that even when he becomes aware of his condition, aware that he is only made an instrument of, aware that he is himself being crushed in the mill, is unable to get out of it. He finds himself bound hand and foot, as it were. He finds that the flame of desires that he had himself kindled is burning him through and through. Then he cries out: Is there no way out? His real search begins then.

II

Let us try to understand the reaction of man, down the ages, to this fourfold bondage viz., to nature, to the relations and the like, to the senses and the ego. Man has tried in various ways to overcome external nature. He has come out of the cave and built up towns and cities to be free of the fear of the ferocious beasts and the whims of the ever-changing nature. He has overcome heat and cold by various methods. He has made nature yield its secrets bountifully. So, in a sense we can say that man has been successful in conquering outer nature. Yet a great question remains to be answered: How many have actually been benefited?

Perhaps a few countries may have been successful in breaking man's attachment to relatives, and the like. But whether that has improved man's

nature in living peacefully with his neighbours, is a matter of dispute.

But when humanity is considered as a whole man's inner nature, i.e. the predominance of the senses and ego over man, has remained at, almost, the same level as what it was thousands of years ago. Civilization has not improved that nature to any appreciable extent. Now, consider what follows: a thousand years ago two nations would have fought out and done with any quarrel, within a few days or months. But today though hot war has gone under, it has been replaced by cold war. Nations are afraid to trust one another. Therefore each is trying to build up its defences to its utmost capacity, with the result that what revenue should normally have gone to build the economic structure of a nation goes into the war machinery. But there is no way out. No nation can, without danger to its very survival and territorial integrity, dare neglect to keep pace with others regarding armaments, especially of those of its neighbours. So this cold war goes on and on. Similar is the situation in every other field of man's contacts, family as well as society. So, where is the change? To consider, therefore, the question of change of nature in man taken on the collective plane is of little avail. We shall confine to man as an individual, for if in a society there were to arise a sufficient number of good individuals that society may ultimately be beneficial not only to itself but to the world as a whole.

III

We have seen how much handicapped man is. Each individual, who seeks to master his lower nature, therefore has to fight his own battle. But what humanity has given him as a legacy is not soft clay but hard rock. From this hard rock he has to cut his image and according as his instruments, that is, his mind and inherent tendencies, are sharp and sound, and his efforts in this direction are ceaselessly continuous, regular and unwavering to that extent the image he will carve out, will also prove attractive and divine. But how to carve that image? In other words, how to attain that perfect mastery over our lower nature? There is a great difference here between the outer and inner worlds. In the outer world we may, if we have enough of wealth, employ the best sculptor or painter to do our job for us. But in the internal sphere, in the case of the mind, ordinarily, none can help, none can get you out of the morass. You have to find your own way out of the labyrinth. It is like the silkworm which builds its cocoon round itself. None can help it to break its house. But if it intends to come out, it may, in the form of a beautiful butterfly, do so. If man eagerly yearns and earnestly makes efforts, he can break this fourfold bondage. But the path is difficult and requires immense patience. It is like walking on the sharp edge of a razor. One should always be on the alert. That has been the experience of sages who have travelled the path.¹ For, in the case of the ordinary man, attachments insinuate themselves, in several ways and once they get hold of him they do not leave him easily. The story of Jadabharata, in the *Mahābhārata*, is aptly illustrative of this fact. Leaving his kingdom and wealth Bharata had retired to a forest to live in contemplation of God. There he came upon a young-one of a deer which was just then delivered by its mother on the bank of a

stream and was being carried away on its current. Its mother had died in fright hearing the roar of some ferocious beast. Moved to pity Bharata rescued the deer and he thought it would be cruel to leave it in the forest with none to take care of. He reared it up with loving care. But when it grew the native urge in the animal took it into the forest; all the love the sage had showered on it could not hold it back. The sage was broken-hearted and roamed the forest calling the deer by its pet name, but it never returned. The thought of the deer however continued to haunt him and when he died his last uttered word was the name of the deer and his last thoughts were of it. Such is attachment. The king in spite of his right resolution could not restrain himself from being attached.

Now, it may be asked: How then to live in the world? Sri Ramakrishna has given us the prescription. He said to the householders: 'Live like a maid-servant in a rich man's house. She takes care of her master's children and calls them my Ram, my Shyam and treats them as her own but all the time she knows that her own children are there in her native village.' But this idea gets root only by long practice of discrimination and detachment. When one is able to detach oneself from the most dear thing without the least wrench at one's heart one can live like a master. The outer circumstances will then fail to produce any lasting impression on one's mind.

This discrimination is the sheet anchor of spiritual life. It is the faculty which makes man choose the right path and discard the vicious. The senses present one with a panorama of objects and sensations, which causes desires to arise. It is discrimination which says whether you can fulfil those desires without any detriment to your spiritual health. If you wisely submit to the dictation of discrimination you are safe, otherwise you involve yourself into insurmountable difficulties.

All sages have unequivocally declared that desire is at the root of all evil. The Buddha said that *tanha* (*trishna*) for things of the world was responsible for man's miseries. Sri Krishna says, 'This *kāma* (desire), this anger, is produced from the Rajoguna. It is a great appetite (*mahāshana*) and the most sinful (*mahāpāpmā*). Know it here (in this world) to be your enemy.'² Here desire and anger are bracketed together as one. For anger is desire obstructed. All other passions may be said to be the offsprings of this desire. As the *Gītā* observes, 'Man who thinks always about sense objects grows attached to them. From attachment desires arise, and when desires are obstructed anger springs up; anger clouds the mind. A darkened (infatuated) mind loses hold of memory (of what is good and what is evil). With loss of memory one fails to command the discriminating power and consequently loses one's hold on spiritual life.'³ Herein we get a clue as to how man becomes increasingly a slave to his passions, and indirectly we get a hint as to what is to be avoided by a spiritual aspirant.

Another great drag on the mind of the present generation is its obsession about reason and logic and the related philosophy. Philosophy, as mere intellectual propositions, without their practice may be all right for a pedant, for a pedagogue and one who wants to earn name, fame and wealth. But as far as the religious life is concerned its use for man is very limited. A mere pundit

cannot have peace for himself, not to speak of his being able to bestow it on others. His peace if at all he must find in what the common run of men also experience i.e. in sense pleasures. But that is exactly what a spiritual aspirant has to avoid and tries to break through. Idle is a man's hope, if he thinks that he can reach the summit of spiritual life by mere theorising about Reality without living a pure and unsullied life and doing assiduous and arduous practices. If any one wants to believe in a person who advocates living any sort of life but doing some intellectual gymnastics, about philosophy, he may well be sure that spiritually his ruin is certain and sealed. For even in the ordinary world, mankind does not trust a man devoid of integrity to be at the helm of affairs of a Government or even an establishment, what then to speak of spiritual life! Let us beware of such wolves in sheep's clothing who come to advise in this manner.

Having pointed out the pitfalls we shall see what is the way towards breaking these bonds and becoming master of ourselves. Man from his first appearance on earth has fought for freedom. Swami Vivekananda says that not only man's but the exertion of every being is to get back its freedom. Because in essence every being is that Brahman which is unfettered and eternal. All beings have somehow fallen from that state of freedom and so are struggling to get back to it. Two types of people tried in two different ways to obtain this freedom. The West concentrated their efforts in the external world whereas in the East, in India, our sages having explored the regions of outer life found that freedom was not to be sought there. They found another world inside themselves, unexplored, untouched, and vast. Commanding it, they realized, man could live like a master and eventually be free from this 'ring of return'.

But this word 'master' has a peculiar ring for an average man. It at once brings before his mind's eye the picture of man with many servants and vast wealth. But this is not the proper form of a master. For control over others may give us momentary satisfaction but cannot give us peace. Even dictators have a fall and while they rule they live in deadly fear of their lives. But to control one's body, one's senses and mind and turn it towards God is to become the real master, to be free from any fear. Man then cares not for anything. Nothing disturbs his peace. That was what our sages found out. And that mastery they said is to be achieved if anyone wants lasting peace and bliss.

Again, the mansion of man's body is constructed of a highly inflammable and explosive material. That is what he forgets. Śrī Śankara observing man's pitiable plight says in his *Vivekacūdamani*: 'The deer, the elephant, the moth, the fish and the black-bee, everyone of these have died by their attachment to one or the other of the five senses, viz., sound etc. respectively. What then is in store for man who is attached to all the five senses!' ⁴ It is said that the deer is enamoured of music. Even though it is beset with danger the moment it hears the sweet sound of the flute it stops rooted to the spot and then is slowly, without its knowledge, drawn towards the sound. This is how, it is believed the hunters used to catch the deer. Similarly the other animals are drawn by their

respective dominant senses. But man is a slave to all the five. How much then should not he be careful not to be entangled or ensnared by them! There is no way of controlling the senses than not to indulge in them. Not to give them any rope, short or long. One should not give any scope for them to occupy one's mind. One should always be engaged either in good works, good thoughts or thought of God.

Sri Ramakrishna recommended taking the name of the Lord as the most efficient remedy for the malady of these passions. He further said, 'As you go to the east, the west is left behind. As man progresses towards God, his passions fall off from him.' Now to remember God, an Unknown Entity to a large section of mankind, is really a great problem. Most of the people have not seen Him, how then can they remember Him? Again, people can remember only things which they have seen and to which they are attached. How can they love God whom they have not seen? True, it is not possible all at once but on the other hand this physical attraction does not last; love in the world wanes and crumbles after a time. Things of the world are transient; today they are, tomorrow they are not. Nothing is permanent. Affliction and joy alternate. Love and hatred follow one another. Śrī Śankara has an exquisite couplet describing the nature of human behaviour: 'As long as man is able to earn money, so long does the family respect him and regard him but when the body becomes feeble and decrepit, no one in the family asks about his welfare.'⁵ And that is literally true in most of the cases. So, man must prepare himself for disillusionment if he is not to lose heart in the end. If he remembers these facts his outlook on life will change. He will then turn to a higher source of solace which neither fails him in his need nor makes any exacting demand. This constant remembrance of the Most High will enthuse man with new vigour to fight his lower nature; then the temptations will begin to have less and less effect on him.

There are, however, ups and downs in spiritual life also. It is not at all a smooth sailing. To tide over the rough weather man must have recourse to holy company. The company of the holy gives a fresh lease of life to his drooping spirits. From these holy men he comes to know that those phases of depression have to be gone through by every aspirant and are not insurmountable barriers, as they first appear to be. The practicant has to persevere until he reaches the goal. This is what the *Gita* calls, continuous practice. The *Gita* gives a high place for practice in religious life. It says that *abhyāsa* and *vairagya* (renunciation) are the two ways of controlling the mind.⁶ Further, the *Gita* declares: 'The wayward mind is to be repeatedly brought under control though it may stray away from the Self from time to time.'⁷ There is no other way to subdue the mind than this. When the mind becomes tranquil, free from all impurities and is not disturbed by anything, then man becomes one with divinity. Then only he can be the master, not otherwise.

Purity of the mind, the *sine qua non* of spiritual life, can be achieved by several ways : (1) by living with a realized soul or holy men and serving them with sincerity, and devotion, (2) by good deeds, (3) by prayer, (4) by taking the name of the Lord, (5) by meditation, and (6) by yoga. Unless one's mind is pure the reflection of the Divine will not be perfect in man; it will appear distorted.

That is why man sees evil everywhere. When man becomes one with the Divine or sees the Lord, to use the devotee's phraseology, he gets rid of all bondages. This has been repeatedly stressed in the Upanisads. And when the bondages are broken man becomes master of himself.

And that is the most covetable state. We may move unconsciously towards it and make false steps in the attempt and retard our progress. But to move consciously and intentionally and deliberately, man must have a clear vision of his goal and the means that he is going to adopt to reach it and then without let or hindrance stick to his path firmly. If he is successful in his attempt, even while he is progressing on the path he will be peaceful and blissful, in spite of the heavy strain he will be subject to, even then he will feel that he is master, unfettered and free. In short, to live like a master one needs, not hoards of wealth, or progeny, or servants, but mastery over one's own mind and complete identification with God.

¹ Katha Up. 3.14.

² Bhagavad Gita, III.37.

³ Ibid, II. 62&63.

⁴ Vivekacūdamani, 76.

⁵ Mohamudgara, 5.

⁶ Bhagavad Gita, VI.35.

⁷ Ibid., VI.23.

CONCEPT OF A WORSHIPFUL BEING

Swami Paratparananda

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FOR ages now, the controversy as to the nature of a worshipful Being is going on. Some say that He is infinite, absolute, without form, eternal, and is inconceivable by the human mind. Others have contended that He is of infinite good qualities, that He has form and though He is all-pervading, He has an abode of His own. Some others again say that He cannot be said to be absolute and infinite, yet He is self-surpassing; yet others give Him a definite form and assert that He can be none other and all other gods are only lesser than Him. Simultaneously a section of humanity has held that there is no such Being at all. It is all a superstition of the frail human mind, of weak persons and should be got over. In the recent centuries this latter view has been gaining ground.

Scientists in the beginning, in the West, were the first to raise the banner of revolt against the then prevailing form of religion and theology there. For the Church at that time, put down, with a firm foot, whatever went against their theological beliefs. Science, therefore, for its very survival had to stage a great fight. Later when the scientists got a free rein to explore their field and ultimately found that science alone could not give peace to mankind, and when contacts with the different religions made it possible to know what was meant by real religion, they discarded this inimical attitude to religion. Nevertheless, the lesser men who call themselves scientists who have as yet contributed nothing either to science or to their own countries are furiously fighting the lost battle. Here, we shall not concern ourselves with these people but limit ourselves to understand the controversy cited at the beginning of this article and enlighten ourselves whether such a controversy is worth the trouble.

II

It is first of all necessary to know as to how this idea of a Being superior to man came to be conceived of in the beginning. The first feeling man experiences, when he comes to know of things, is that he is bound. In the beginning man might have felt the immensity of the power of Nature, of the elements and therefore personifying them worshipped them, so that they may be propitious to him. So there came to be the worship of the sun, the earth, the fire and water. The earth was worshipped, when man came to depend on

cultivation. It was propitiated in order that it may yield crops in plenty. Man felt that these were more free than him and would grant him freedom, when propitiated. Swami Vivekananda says: 'If we try to examine the various sorts of worship all over the world, we would see that the rudest of mankind are worshipping ghosts, demons and the spirits of their forefathers. Serpent worship, worship of tribal gods and worship of the departed ones, why do they do this? Because they feel that in some unknown way these beings are greater, more powerful than themselves, and limit their freedom. They therefore seek to propitiate these beings in order to prevent them from molesting them, in other words, to get more freedom. They also seek to win favour from these superior beings, to get by gift of the gods what ought to be earned by personal effort.'¹ So, we can say that this idea of a superior being or beings originated with the bondage man felt — the moment he began to look around — and the freedom he hankered after; a superior being he thinks would give him unlimited freedom. Even in the crudest concept of God this idea is manifest. To quote Swami Vivekananda again: 'These two views (the ancestor worship and worship of Nature), though they seem to be contradictory, can be reconciled on a third basis, which to my mind is the real germ of religion, and that I propose to call the struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses. Either, man goes to seek for the spirits of his ancestors, the spirits of the dead, that is, he wants to get a glimpse of what there is after the body is dissolved, or, he desires to understand the power working behind the stupendous phenomena of nature. Whichever of these is the case, one thing is certain, that he tries to transcend the limitations of the senses. He cannot remain satisfied with his senses; he wants to go beyond them.'² Later as man evolved and began to think deeply, the idea of God also evolved. God came to be conceived of as a Person, sitting somewhere in the heaven infinitely merciful, infinitely kind, who showers blessings on the good. Many gods gave place to one God, omniscient, and omnipotent. In other words Monotheism became prevalent. Now, most of the religious can not go beyond this idea, though there are indications in their scriptures which point to higher and nobler sentiments.

Well, as it is, it is not bad; we need not blame them. But when they pose to be all-knowers, and dogmatic and begin to condemn every other thought, every other sentiment, every other religion as only worth to be consigned to the dust heap, or flames, we have to pity them for their shallowness; for they are as Christ said: 'Eyes have they but they see not; ears have they but they hear not.'

Further, by these condemnations they not only expose their intolerance of a second creed or religion, other than their own, but also express lack of depth, lack of sympathy, lack of sensitivity, and fear to go beyond the limitations set by themselves. Let us remind ourselves that these are not things of the past, but of the living present. Dogmatism and fanaticism die hard. If one goes through some of the recent publications of the West and subsequently reproduced in India too, one will find how patent this fact is. Hinduism and India have again become the target of vested interests both in and outside India. This is a thing which cannot but be noted in passing though a detailed survey of it is not necessary in this context.

Now to return to our subject: This idea of a Personal God residing somewhere in the heaven was all right for the common masses but the Hindu seers were not satisfied with such a position. They persisted in their search and advanced further. They said, 'Well, God has an abode but he has an abode in us too, in everyone of us. Nay, we are his parts. Nature also is a part of Him. Just as man has a soul and a body, the whole universe and all the living and non-living beings are his body and He is its soul.' Here people still held on to a Personal God.

But there were seers who were not yet satisfied with the idea. Swami Vivekananda explains why they were not satisfied: 'This explanation — that there is a Being beyond all these manifestations of Maya and who is attracting us towards Himself, and that we are all going towards Him — is very good, says the Vedanta, but yet the perception is not clear, the vision is dim and hazy, although it does not directly contradict reason. . . . The idea that the goal is far off, far beyond nature, attracting us all towards it, has to be brought nearer and nearer, without degrading or degenerating it.'³ The sages, therefore, indomitably struggled on until they came to the last word of Vedanta — Non-dualism, the idea of One without a second. 'The God of heaven becomes the God in nature, and the God in nature becomes the God who is nature, and the God who is nature becomes the God within this temple of the body, and the God dwelling in the temple of the body at last becomes the temple itself, becomes the soul and man — and there it reaches the last words Vedanta can teach.'⁴ This idea, however, is beyond the grasp of most people. If any one says 'You and I are Gods,' or 'Ātman is Brahman', the ordinary man will be shocked at — what he considers — this blasphemy. It is a thought too deep for most of mankind. They will either make a hash of this idea or will simply try to ridicule it. So, we see that every man wants whatever he considers as true to be accepted by everyone else. But we must ask ourselves, when we propound a theory, specially about religion and God: What right have we to condemn others or force them to accept our opinions? Fanatics have no patience to reflect upon this. They will either ask you to follow their pet theories or suffer the consequences. In olden days it was the sword but now it is abuse and vilification. We do not know, how God, who is supposed to be all-love, can remain where so much hatred is rampant.

III

Now, we have so many concepts of God. Which concept is true? What is the way out of this labyrinth of concepts? What must a common man follow? Were the great sages all-wrong? If they were not, whom should one follow? is the common man's dilemma. But to the Hindu, if he had studied his own scriptures, heard his Masters with attention and faith, this should be no problem at all. Even as early as in the times of Rig Veda our sages found out that 'Truth is One but sages call It variously, as Indra, Varuna, and the like.'⁵ By whatever name one called that Supreme Being it was one and the same. Later

too we find this idea being again and again repeated and stressed. In the *Bhagavad Gītā* Sri Krishna says, 'One who worships Me (the Lord), in whatever form, to him I come in that form. For, O Arjuna, all people travel everywhere in my path alone.'⁶ A poet sang, 'Men take different paths, straight or crooked through different tendencies, yet, O Lord, Thou alone art the ultimate goal of all men, as ocean is of all rivers.'⁷ Sri Ramakrishna by his intuitive realizations verified this truth and then in his homely inimitable style said: 'Just as water drawn from the different places of a tank by people speaking several languages is variously named, as 'jal', pāni', 'aqua' and 'water', so according to the distinctive tendencies of man, he addresses God, as Brahman, Allah, Krishna, Kali and the like.'

So, it is wrong to be dogmatic about any one concept of God. Those who insist that God can be only what they consider Him to be are consciously or unconsciously dictating terms to God. In what a predicament should that God not be! Do they not consider this overlordship of Him? If God were such a weak person as to listen to the dictates of a community however large and powerful, He would be no better than the tribal gods conceived of in earlier stages of man's history. Yet, why do people persist in their self-righteous notions? In one word, if we have to say, they are not at all perturbed about God. They are concerned with all other things except Him. So there is conflict and quarrel, dispute and bloodshed, on the outer forms, and modes of worship.

Before dealing with the question, what is the path which one has to choose from among so many concepts, we have to consider one's own nature. Man is man because he can think, why then should he be reduced to the position of dumb driven cattle? The constitution of each man is different. No two persons are exactly alike even in physical appearance. Man comes into this world with loads of tendencies and never with a *tabula rasa*. The very fact that beings are born, say the Indian scriptures, is due to the momentum of past actions or Karma, and accordingly are their temperaments formed. The Hindu scriptures speak of three *gunas* or constituents of Nature, viz. *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, and according as any of these constituents is predominant the nature of man is tranquil, active or inert. For 'as is one's nature so is one's faith. And man's character develops according to his faith, therefore as is his faith so is man'.⁸ If man has to make real progress he should be allowed to develop in his own way according to his own nature. What another man can do, if possible, is to give him a helping hand in his own way and never by interfering with his ideal or condemning what he has cherished. If one cannot do that and if one is still solicitous for the welfare of that person, what best he can do is to keep off that person's track. What Sri Ramakrishna taught by reprimand and instructions to 'M', the writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, can be studied with much benefit towards our spiritual growth. 'M', who had imbibed the idea that image worship is not a proper mode of worship, at the beginning of his contact with the Master came forward to argue that though God may have form, yet 'Certainly He is not the clay image!'

MASTER (*interrupting*): 'But why clay? It is an image of Spirit'.

'M' could not quite understand the significance of this 'image of Spirit'.

‘But, sir,’ he said to the Master, ‘one should explain to those who worship the clay image that it is not God, and that, while worshipping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image. One should not worship clay.’

MASTER (*sharply*): ‘That’s the one hobby of you Calcutta people – giving lectures and bringing others to the light! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others?’

By Calcutta people the Master means people who are imbued with the modern ideas. Man will do more harm than good by such interference. Sri Krishna says in the *Gita*, ‘Do not create confusion in the minds of the ignorant who are attached to work. For a wise man should encourage them in all work by steadily engaging himself in work.’⁹ By working in an unselfish manner, without any motive man’s mind gets purified and in a purified mind values of things become more and more clear until he comes to know the true nature of things. Similarly whatever a person’s idea of God may be, he will, if he is sincere, come to the Truth. That is why Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘He who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone. He alone teaches us, who has created this universe, who has made the sun and moon, men and beasts and all other beings. The Lord has done so many things – will He not show people the way to worship Him? If they need teaching, then He will be the Teacher. He is our Inner Guide.’

IV

What is, therefore, required of man is sincerity and yearning to know God, to see Him. Have we that yearning? Then we are on the right path. Do we do our spiritual practices regularly and systematically? Then there is hope that we shall one day see Him, that we are surely making progress on the path though we may not be aware of it. But mere book knowledge and parrot-like repetition of scriptures will avail us nothing, take us nowhere. It cannot show us God. The Hindu scriptures openly and boldly avow this: ‘Neither by expounding (of scriptures), nor by ratiocination nor by reading a great many Texts can this Ātman be attained. It is attained by him who seeks Him alone. Such a one’s soul is illumined by the light of the Lord.’¹⁰ A great significance is attached to the words ‘Him alone’. It will not do to seek God as one among the many things you desire. It is no seeking at all. One should seek Him and Him alone. And this means that there should be no other thought in the mind and no other word in the speech except about Him, and no other deed but that which is dedicated to Him. And this should be done not for a day or a year but till realization comes. Can such steadfastness and one-pointedness be attained all of a sudden? By long, continuous and regular practice one gets a little concentration. How much of practice is then not necessary to have this desire to seek ‘God alone’! He only truly worships who worships in this manner. Such a person attains Light no matter what form or ideal he worships. Attaining Light himself he becomes a light unto others. So it is not only the concept of God that brings man Light but his devotion to that concept. Swami Vivekananda said

that that age will be an ideal one when each person will pursue his ideal of religion alone without any interference whatsoever from anywhere.

Let us understand this thoroughly and shed all inimical attitudes towards other sects, other religions and pursue our own paths with steadfastness and devotion, remembering at the same time that hatred and fanaticism will not lead us anywhere near God. On the other hand, it will take us away from Him. Study the lives of the saints and sages and find out one from among them who had attained that state by hating others. God is all-love. So if we have to worship God we should also become all-loving. Then and then alone our worship will be fruitful.

¹ Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I, pp. 332, 333. Seventh edition, 1046.

² Ibid., Vol. II, p. 59 (1948).

³ Ibid., p. 128.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Rig Veda, 1. 22. 165. 46.

⁶ Bhagavad Gita, 4.11.

⁷ Shivamahimnastotra, 7.

⁸ Bhagavad Gita, 17, 3.

⁹ Ibid, 3.26.

¹⁰ Mundakopanishad, III. ii.3.

THE NEGLECTED PART OF MAN

Swami Paratparananda

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WHAT is the idea that we have of man? Usually it is that he belongs to a certain race, a particular country, a certain religion, a distinct community and so on. He is also known to be wise or dull, active or lazy, healthy or diseased, young or old, virtuous or wicked, suffering pain or enjoying pleasure and so on. Here the common man's idea about a human being reaches the blind alley, as it were. What is beyond that he either does not strive to know, or is ignorant of it.

Now, let us analyse this view: race, health, disease, youth, old age – all these – what do they represent? What do they indicate? A little thought will show that all these distinctions can be only of the body. Again, the country, indicates the situation of the body, and wealth and property bring to our mind material possessions. So in all these descriptions we think of man as a creature made of sinews, bone, flesh and blood and we add some more earthly goods, when we think of him as possessing wealth.

However, when we think of him as enjoying pleasure or suffering pain, when we impute to him wickedness, dullness or laziness or when we ascribe to him virtue, activity, or wisdom, we, of course, to a certain extent do not think of man as made only of the body. We unconsciously acknowledge something more in him. For instance, when we say that a certain act of a person pains one it is not the physical pain that is meant, but the feelings of the person. We can understand it better if we substitute the word grief or sorrow in place of "pain". Similarly pleasure is felt only in the mind. It is also a feeling. Likewise the feelings, compassion, hatred and so on, cannot be of the body but of something else; some will say that it is of the heart, whereas others will posit it as of the mind. Then there are the faculties of thinking and willing. Now, wherever these feelings may be located, it is conceded that there is something which is other than the body which resides in it and which does this feeling, thinking and willing. Thus far all agree; though some materialists may still persist that all feelings are also due to the changes in the brain cells. However what puzzles the materialist is that the body, though its brain cells remain intact, fails to respond to the stimulus however strong from outside, when that vital power, life, has left it. On the other hand, this gives the believer the idea that there is something else even beyond the body, the senses and the mind, which dwells in the body, and makes it live and move.

Now, how can a common man know that there is something which is beyond the body and mind? Vedanta gives us the answer. It analyses man's

states of consciousness. Mostly man is satisfied with his waking experiences. And most of the intellectuals even do not care to know about the sub-conscious which is active in the dream state and subtly forms man's character in his waking. It is like a store-house. The impressions that are received in the waking by thought, word and deed of a man go to make this store. And whenever occasion arises that particular impression springs forward and presents itself compelling man's attention to itself. And if man succumbs to these impressions repeatedly it forms into a habit and habit becomes nature in no time. So it is necessary that we should know about our own sub-conscious state as well. It is here that we should be careful, for this sub-conscious forms the basis, the foundation, of man's character. Patanjali says that when one's mind is not devoid of waves, modifications, the mind becomes of the nature of the modifications.¹ The importance of the subconscious in the formation of character, as well as in mental and physical ailments, to a certain extent, has now come to be recognized by the Western psychologists too. But this is sadly neglected by most, even among the intelligentsia.

There is another state says the Upanisad, which it calls *susupti*, where man does not desire anything, does not dream anything,² that is where not only his body, but all the senses along with the mind take rest.³ This is deep sleep. In this deep sleep man is not conscious of anything but after waking up he becomes aware that he had passed through a state which was 'blissful and where he did not know anything'. Let us probe a little into this experience which is every man's estate. When man says he was 'blissful and did not know anything', two experiences are perceived to go into the formation of that state, one as a corollary of the other. There is bliss and there is ignorance. Ignorance of what? Of the world. People are afraid when it is said that there is ignorance in this state. Even the advanced student of religion finds it hard to acknowledge this. In the Upanisads we find students even after living long under a teacher when asked to analyse this state have put forth their genuine doubt as to whether such a state can really be welcome, whether there is anything at all existing in that state. In the *Chāndogya Upanisad*, for instance, when Indra was taught, 'When a man is asleep, with senses withdrawn and serene and sees no dream — that is the Self',⁴ he was confused. He thought over his experience in that state and came back scared to the teacher and said, 'Venerable Sir, verily, in this state the Self does not know itself as "I am this", nor does it know these creatures. It almost amounts to annihilation. I do not see any good in such a state'.⁵ Yet who does not know that a dreamless sleep is the best invigorator for the body and mind, that it is the real restful state! Man also knows that there is bliss in that state. Yet, says the Upanisad, that is only the nearest approach to man's real nature that can be made by any living being. The real is far far above that. And that is the Atman. And that is to be seen.⁶ When man knows his real

¹ Yoga Sūtras; I.4.

² Mandukya, 5.

³ Chāndogya, VI, viii.1.

⁴ Chāndogya, VIII, xi.1.

⁵ Chāndogya, VIII, xi.1.

⁶ Brihadāranyaka, IV.v.3.

nature, when he realizes who he really is, he forgets all the world. So we see that real bliss is not in accumulating treasures here but in giving them up, in forgetting all about the world and being one with the Self. As in deep sleep, we have not a care, not the slightest worry, not any hankering, so when man realizes his real Nature he becomes perfectly care free, like a child. Now we may ask why is it then that it is equated to *susupti*? No, there is no question of bracketing the two. As an experience that is in the easy reach of every man, the state of *susupti* is cited as an example where there is no desiring, no dreaming, just as in the true nature of man in order to give an inkling into the nature of the latter. *Susupti* is also a state where unalloyed happiness exists — a happiness which is not induced by something from outside of the Self. But there the comparison ends. In *susupti* there is ignorance of both the world and of one's own true nature.⁷ But in the *turiya*, the fourth state, as the sages call the super-conscious state, there is knowledge and illumination. Ignorance has dropped off and that makes a great difference, as vast as between light and darkness. This fact should not be forgotten. If it is forgotten then we are certain to confuse the issue. The difference between the two, viz. deep sleep and the super-conscious is well brought out by Swami Vivekananda when he said: 'The super-conscious state cannot be described, but we know it by its fruits. An idiot, when he goes to sleep, comes out of sleep an idiot or even worse. But another man goes into the state of meditation, and when he comes out he is a philosopher, a sage, a great man.'

II

Now this part in us, the spiritual element, the soul, the Ātman, is totally neglected by us. We take care of the body, of our health. Even from our childhood that has been done for us by our parents. They might have passed sleepless nights at our bedside on occasions, they have also taken precaution to cultivate our mind. For no parent likes to leave his child to develop into a dunce. No effort, within their means, will they spare to prepare the child to face the world. And when grown up we also try to keep ourselves abreast of the developments that are taking place around us, so that we may not be termed backward. Nevertheless, all this is done to face the world, the outside world alone. The inner man's hunger is not appeased. Rarely do we come across people who think of the welfare of their children from this spiritual point of view. The thought of the life's purpose is not inculcated in children, as it should be, with the result that a great void is left. Further, life in the present times has become mechanical and it swiftly rushes through as if on a supersonic aircraft. Man is aimless today. He has not the courage to face the consequences of failure in the world, nay he trembles at the very thought of it. Poverty even for the sake of religion he dares not accept. And this keeps him clinging to some source of income or other till his end. Naturally in this stormy weather it is impossible that man could devote his time to think of things higher. And to make life more complex, man's necessities go on increasing at a telescopic rate; luxuries become

⁷ Kaivalyopanishad, I.13.

necessities overnight, and therefore to keep up with the tempo of the increasing wants, man's life is spent in ever more servitude till the call of death snatches him away. Where then can he find time to devote to his spiritual exercises?

However, man forgets that nothing real can be achieved without sacrifice. Young men nowadays go on adventurous expeditions. They climb hazardous steep slopes of the mountains, cross difficult terrain, face worst weather, frost, gale and all. Are not many lives lost in such expeditions? Are not some permanently disabled or disfigured during these adventures? If we look at this phenomenon, we cannot say that the spirit of adventure has been lost, only it has been misapplied, misdirected. They do not pause to think, 'What after all is our gain in these expeditions?' A little fame, a great ovation for once, or at the most a living for life. But then is that all that we came for into this world? Is that the aim of human life? Sri Ramakrishna says it is not. The aim of human life, he says, is God-realization, to know God; to see him; to see him not only in the Image but also in our very being, to be aware of His presence always, first in ourselves and then in everything. 'Only he who sees Me in everything and everything in Me, he does not lose My presence nor do I lose sight of him',⁸ says Sri Krishna. What is the meaning of God losing sight of us? It means that we do not put any barrier between the Lord and ourselves. Though it is not possible that we can hide anything from God yet we can hoodwink ourselves by ignoring His presence. That is what most people do. They ignore that Divine Being who resides in their hearts, and thus lose sight of Him. But when they get the vision of God back, there is no more delusion for them. That is what Sri Krishna means in this verse. The next sloka makes this clear, 'One who worships Me residing in all beings in a spirit of unity lives in Me, whatever be his mode of life.'⁹ Such a person is always conscious of his true nature, conscious of God's presence; then he loses his identity in God.

But man is afraid of attaining oneness with God. He is perturbed when he thinks of losing his identity, his separateness. Sri Gaudapāda, the grand-teacher of Sri Sankara, declares, 'Even advanced souls, yogins, are afraid of this *asparśa* yoga, which is difficult of attainment, for they see fear where there is really fearlessness.'¹⁰ So strong are our inherent tendencies, *samskāras*, that it is very difficult and painful to loosen our ties to this world, this body and the ego. Nevertheless, it is a fact that unless we cultivate a taste for the higher things these tendencies will bind us more and more and make us increasingly miserable. If, therefore, man wants to be rid of miseries he should strive to know his true nature.

How can it be done? The *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* gives us the direction: 'Hear about it, cogitate over it, and meditate upon it.'¹¹ Another Upanisad says, 'Many have not the opportunity to hear about this. Many even after hearing do not understand it. Wonderful is the teacher of that *Vidya* (knowledge). And rare indeed is the student who grasps it when taught by a wise person'. That this is

⁸ Gita, VI.30.

⁹ Ibid., VI.31.

¹⁰ Mandu

¹¹ Br.Up., IV.v.3.

actually so we can know from the state of affairs in the world, not only of today but from the history of all ages and of all climes. How this is too true can be known from some incidents which Sri Ramakrishna used to narrate. People used to come to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar and among them some would go and stay to hear Sri Ramakrishna. But others, who accompanied them, after a time would begin to nudge their companions and ask, 'when will you go?' The devotees who were all attention to the Master would just sign to them to sit quiet. But after some time they would again prod and then would say to them, 'You can come when you like, we shall wait for you in the boat'. Does it not look strange? But that was what actually happened. So deep were the tendencies, that they could not bear even talk about spirituality. And if such *samskāras* are to be uprooted, it should be done when people are still young, when habits have not yet been formed, when resolution and strength can be utilized to curb their taking any ugly form. Then only can one be sure of detaching oneself from one's desire for mundane things and attending to one's Ātman. It is like the bending of a supple bamboo pole, when tender, to the required shape. It can easily be done. But once the pole matures you can do nothing with it except use it as it is. It is hard to master these tendencies, and very difficult it is to know our real nature. Does not Sri Krishna say, 'Among thousands of men one possibly endeavours for perfection, and among those that endeavour (one perchance becomes perfect) and even among the perfect, one possibly knows Me in My true perspective'?¹² Sri Ramakrishna used to sing a song, of a Tantric mystic, Ramaprasad, very expressive of the situation:

'In the world's busy market place,
 O Shyama, Thou art flying kites;
 High up they soar on the wind of hope,
 held fast by Maya's string.
 Their frames are human skeletons,
 their sails of the three gunas made;
 But all their curious workmanship is merely
 for ornament.
 Upon the kite-strings Thou hast rubbed
 the manja-paste of worldliness.
 So as to make each straining strand
 all the more sharp and strong.
 Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best
 but one or two break free.'¹³

You may be wondering what the neglected part of man has to do with God! It has everything to do with Him. If you are a dualist you are His servant and therefore remembering the Lord makes you conscious of your spiritual entity. If you are a qualified monist you are a part of the Lord, remembering the Lord you remember also your real relation to Him. Lastly, if you are a non-

¹² Gita, VII.3.

¹³ The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p.64.

dualist you know that Ātman and Brahman are non-different and remembering about Brahman you know about the Ātman.

Therefore, as we tend our bodies, and cultivate our minds, take care of our wealth and do all other things in the world outside, so must we also look after our inner Being. For it is the source of all virtues. Grounded in it the virtues do not fail us. Apart from it, though we may develop some good qualities, when faced with tribulations the seeming virtues will wear off like the coating of a gold-plated ornament. Man today feels forlorn because he has neglected his inner Being. Let him try to remember his Self and work on, he will then find everything falling into its proper place again.

MESSAGE OF THE GITA FOR THE PRESENT DAY WORLD

Swami Paratparananda

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I

THE one scripture which fulfils the need of every righteous person and under any or every circumstance is possibly the *Bhagavad Gita*. Of course the Vedas and the Upanisads are the main source of all Hindu faith and therefore cannot be discounted. But the *Gita* has their essence all brought together in one place. It shows you how to live in the world without being tainted by its colour. It encourages every one to follow his traditional duties, or the avocations in which each man is placed, following which, it says, he will come to the highest.¹ This is the foundation of the *varnāshrama dharma*. It shows how every one was considered a useful member of the great family of humanity. The *Gita* has a message for every class and every section of human society. It never tells anyone to lie low and suffer humiliation. Sri Krishna, the teacher, says time and again to Arjuna, and through him to every one that is facing his battle of life, 'to stand up and fight' for the righteous cause. 'If you fall,' he says, 'you will attain heaven and if you win you shall enjoy the earth; therefore stand up firmly determined to fight.'²

It has a message for every man, to be honest, to be self-sacrificing, to acquire divine qualities. Its message to the spiritual aspirant has been dealt with, in various ways, all throughout the *Gita*; and all along the march of time several commentaries — delineating its message to the various types of aspirants in the different denominations of the Hindu religion — have been written, expounded and enlarged upon. It has a message to the rulers, to be undaunted, to rule righteously and be firm against the foe. This message of fearlessness is there in the Upanisads. Though this code is not new to the *Gita*, in its reiteration the *Gita* is most explicit, and thoroughly purposeful. There is no mincing of matters, no dallying of words. It respects no persons in giving out what it intends to teach. Krishna severely upbraids his most beloved of friends and relatives, Arjuna, at the meekness and weakness displayed by the latter. He says, 'Yield not to unmanliness, O son of Prtha, it does not behove

¹ Gita, 18.46.

² Ibid., 2.37.

you (a man of prowess). Giving up this weakness of the heart stand up.’³ Here you have a message for the warrior, nay for all. Swami Vivekananda said that this is the message of the *Gita*, not to be weak, not to be cowed down by brute force. It is these and other words that poured forth from the lips of Sri Krishna that slowly roused the wilting heart of Arjuna, as it were by a shower of rain; the gathered clouds of infatuation were scattered and consciousness returned, until at last freed from doubt he was willing and eager to fulfil his part,⁴ in the circumstances.

There have been scoffers and there have been sceptics who have belittled or did not believe in the message of the scriptures. It is easy to run down religion, spiritual effort and scriptures, when man is in affluence and peace and happiness prevails. But when a trying time comes and he is pressed on all sides, it is these words of practical wisdom, of calm collectedness and of vigour and encouragement that support him. *Gita* is such a scripture. It has not yet lived its time. It shall last to eternity. Though it was told thousands of years ago, its message has not become obsolete nor even dull. On the other hand, every time we think about it, every time we are faced with a new problem it has a solution for even that new problem, if only we care to go through it, thus bringing to our attention its vitality and usefulness. It is, therefore, incumbent on every Hindu, for the matter of that on every person, who likes to live a life which can be properly so named, to study and imbibe the proper mode of conduct that is becoming to the position and place he occupies. For a life without a purpose, without manliness, according to the Aryan code of morals, is no life at all.

The world today is poised on the brink of a precipice and it requires enormous courage to face the crisis and decide in what manner the situation can be tackled. Here again the *Gita* comes to our rescue. Sri Krishna, by his own example, sets before us an ideal which shows how a problem, a difficult situation can be countenanced. In the midst of the warring parties, the serene and unruffled picture of Sri Krishna holding the reins of Arjuna’s horses brings out in no uncertain terms the idea of how man should live in the world, unattached, like the lotus leaf in water,⁵ as he himself says. In a beautiful hymn to Sri Ramakrishna Swami Vivekananda also brings before our mind’s eye the majesty and grandeur of this picture of Sri Krishna. He sings: ‘He who quelled the noise, terrible like that at the time of destruction, arising from the battle (Kurukshetra), who destroyed the terrible yet natural night of ignorance (of Arjuna) and who roared out the *Gita* sweet and appeasing; That renowned soul is born now as Sri Ramakrishna.’ Though the *Gita* is sweet and appeasing every word of it dings into our ears the message of courage and strength in a lion’s roar. We cannot dare ignore its clarion call to arise and awake.

Further, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna: ‘Giving up attachment to the fruits of one’s actions, and always contented, without depending on anything, though one is engaged in action, one does not do anything.’⁶ In this small verse is

³ Ibid., 2.3.

⁴ Ibid., 18.73.

⁵ Ibid., 5.10.

⁶ Ibid., 4.20.

contained a meaning that can last and support every man for his whole lifetime. The one point that Sri Krishna stresses here is that it is cowardice to run away from duty, from a righteous action, a noble cause. Man, as long as he lives, must perform some action or other, he cannot live idly and one day he must die. Swami Vivekananda used to say, 'Die you must, but have a great ideal to die for, and it is better to die with a great ideal in life'. This idea is contained in the above utterance of Sri Krishna. In another place he says, 'To work only have you the right and not to the fruits thereof. Let not the fruits of action be the motive behind your actions; nor be attached to inaction.'⁷ He is the hero who, amidst stresses and strains, can stand up and meet them boldly without caring for what happens to him or for the fruits of his action. But this requires enormous practice and tremendous will power. We have to cultivate it.

'The earth is for the heroes to enjoy,' says a Sanskrit proverb and in every day of our life we come to experience it. The weak and the infirm are trodden down everywhere. Stand up to your rights, that is the call of the age. That is what the *Gita* also teaches. But it also teaches us not to encroach upon another man's right. Righteousness has been the moral code of the *Gita*, of India throughout its history. Swami Vivekananda says India never went to conquer any country. It never subjected any nation, not that it was weak or infirm to do so, but it recognised man's right to live in his own way in his own country. On the other hand, over and over again India has been trodden over, conquered by various races. But it has risen anew showing the very conquerors that they were not able to crush down its infinite vitality to grow and assert its right persistently afresh. That has been possible because of the faith the Hindus had in their scriptures, of the eternality of the soul, of the necessity of spirituality in a world of mundane thinking, because of its firm conviction that Hinduism, the eternal religion, the Sanatana Dharma will live and also because India has a message, not only to its own people but to the people of the world as a whole — that in the framework of this world India has a prominent role to play as a reviver of higher values. Swami Vivekananda observes that India has more than once contributed its spirituality and its philosophy to the regeneration of the world and it has yet to play its part in the world in this capacity. So it is essential that India keeps its banner of spirituality flying high and to do so keep its culture and individuality as a nation intact and sound.

II

Tradition has it that the *Gita* was taught on the battle field to Arjuna. Some say that it is an allegory referring to the eternal struggle that goes on in man's mind between the righteous aspirations and unrighteous desires. Whatever that may be the *Gita* has a word of solace, a word of encouragement, a word regarding one's duty to everyone of us, wherever we may be placed.

What is the message of the *Gita* for the present day world — a world of science and technology, of ratiocination and logical analysis? Here we have to

⁷ Ibid., 2.47.

be clear in our minds. It will not do to shut our eyes to the unseen and unexperienced truth, in the name of these high sounding words. A large part of man's life remains hidden from him, and usually science does not take cognizance of this fact. It is satisfied with phenomenological experience and physical reactions. But man is more. Man is not a mere physical entity, he has a psychological being, a spiritual being within him. This fact has to be conceded and unless this is done we cannot adduce any meaning to life. If man was to live like any other of the animal species why was he specially endowed with the thinking faculty more than other animals? Is it to exploit all other living beings? That does not make any sense. Man has a higher purpose, higher value to cultivate, higher and nobler things to know and to assert in his own life. That is why he has been gifted with that power of discrimination, of thinking. It is possible to use this power either in the constructive or destructive way. Mere morality is not all that is meant by higher values. Morality without a spiritual basis is like a house without foundation. It cannot stand the analysis of reason: Why should we be moral? If spiritual values are not taken into consideration you cannot answer this question satisfactorily. No amount of legislation can make a man good, though he may be superficially well-behaved. There must be some principle which he struggles to achieve. There must be an ideal, a goal to attain; without that man is no man.

It is painful to see that in some quarters a wholly wrong interpretation is put as to what is meant by a secular state. They conceive it as a state consisting of people without religion. They want to believe that religion hurts people. They fear that religion, if taught to their children may upset the apple cart of their plans, their designs. In the name of education they want unrestrained freedom to behave as one pleases, as if education means a passport to licence and indulgence. Such may be the practice somewhere, in spite of all effort against it, but if India tries to adopt or imitate such behaviour the country's future would be bleak notwithstanding all the progress it may make in other directions. Restraint and sacrifice are the two essential qualities that the people of a country with a vast population like India must inculcate if it means to maintain morality and harmony in its own land. That is what Swami Vivekananda reiterated when he observed: 'The national ideals of India are Renunciation and Service. Intensify her in those channels and the rest will take care of itself.' Outward renunciation along with inner dispassion may not be possible for all, but everyone can practise inward renunciation, control over the senses, to a smaller or greater extent. And if one cannot practise it that does not give him any right to water down the ideal or condemn it. It is no use trying to accuse religion for all that is unhealthy in society. On the other hand it is the other way about; it is the spiritual force that still sustains society.

There is enough indiscipline in the student world to require any one to plead their cause for more liberality. A disciplined life, where it is not overburdened by unnecessary dogma or harshness, should be a welcome feature in all schools and colleges and not a matter to be decried or ashamed of. If only we will remember that the students of today are to be the torch-bearers of our culture and the future leaders of India it will be obvious, to anyone with

a little understanding, as to how much they should be instructed in restraint of the senses and enabled to form a temperament of sacrifice. For the lack of this spirit of sacrifice, in a sufficient measure, and the overwhelmingly predominant desire for personal gains it is that India had to suffer repeated humiliations at the hands of alien hordes in the past and even today suffers from so many maladies. Let us remember this and learn to live a disciplined life and help the younger generation to do so. Example is better than precept. That is what Sri Krishna says to Arjuna, 'In whatever way the great men act in that way the common man acts as well'.⁸ He wanted Arjuna to be an exemplar. Otherwise it would not have mattered whether Arjuna fought the battle or relinquished the kingdom and retired to the forest. Sri Krishna would have brought victory to the Pandavas even without Arjuna. But that would have been a bad example for all time. That is why he infused into Arjuna the spirit to discriminate between the right and the wrong and stand steadfast for the just cause whatever might be the outcome.

Mental poise is another quality that the *Gita* recommends and teaches how to acquire. Not to be swayed by joy or sorrow, happiness or misery, not to be deterred by calamity, but face everything that comes one's way with an unperturbed mind, and determination to do the right thing is a virtue that is always an asset, not only in spiritual life but also in all other walks of life. A man works himself into a fever for a wrong done but in his anger he may forget the very noble characteristics for which he is fighting. 'One who is not elated (at gains) nor hates, one who does not grieve (at misery or adversity) nor desires anything and gives up all good or evil and is devoted to God is dear to Him',⁹ says Sri Krishna. As already said these virtues stand one in good stead in every situation. Depending on the Lord, to work as His tool, leaving all results of one's actions in His hands, can be done only by one who is clear in his mind as to the righteousness of the cause. He can then stand up against the whole world, if need be, without even a tremor of the heart. For the world is a strange place where justice and righteousness are bartered away to serve one's needs. As long as it is convenient to have you on one's side it is all right, but the moment you stand up for justice and if it cuts at your friends cloak in however insignificant a manner that friendship goes overboard. But people forget that truth alone triumphs, maybe the injured party has to suffer a great deal, but ultimately truth does triumph, even in secular pursuits.

The *Gita* has been the solace of millions of aspirants; it has also been the strength of many who though not exclusively given over to the spiritual path strive for a good cause. Let us seek its guidance in all our avocations, and be on the right track so that when our day of departure from this world comes, we can leave it without a regret and with the satisfaction of having fulfilled our task.

⁸ Gita, 3.21.

⁹ Ibid., 12,17.

REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

Swami Paratparananda

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ONE of the effective ways by which one can obtain release, attain liberation, from the trammels of this world is by the constant practice of the presence of God, say the saints of all religions and of all times. Ordinarily man is aware of the physical world, the world that can be grasped by the five senses: of hearing, touch, seeing, taste, and smell. His estimate of this world in the present age is that it is only a material entity. He does not see it even as God's creation. No doubt he is moved and lured by its constantly changing panorama. The beautiful sunset on a lake or the sea, the wonderful hues and sweep of the rainbow, the cool moonlight on a silent night, each of these, may put him into a rapture. The gentle murmur of a brook and sweet chirping of the birds soothe his nerves and sometimes send him into an ecstasy, as it were. Yet all these may touch only the superficial part in him, that is to say, his senses and to some extent his mind also. He may remember those moments all throughout his life as moments of un-inhibited and inexpressible joy. But they do not enable him to make a deeper dent in his personality if they cannot touch something of the spiritual being in him. Such a person's susceptibility to Nature is only fleeting. The next moment, of such a lofty experience, he may plunge himself into some dastardly act, or perverted action, without any qualms whatsoever, if he does not believe in a higher purpose of life, in a nobler destiny of man, in a Being that lives in all beings and witnesses everything. Nevertheless this influence of Nature is not discounted in spiritual life. In fact Sri Ramakrishna's first ecstasy, which happened when he was a boy of seven, may be said to have been induced by Nature, when a flock of white cranes passed flying across the sombre clouds in the vast expanse of a village sky, unimpeded by skyscrapers and the dust, and smoke of industrialized cities.

But, more often than not, man does not strive to look beyond appearances, beyond the phenomenal world. That is why his desserts too are of the world. One cannot reach the Beyond, the Eternal by having

recourse to the ephemeral¹ says Yama, the Lord of Death, to Naciketa in the *Kathopanishad*. It is also the experience of all in this world: as you sow so you reap. What then should one do? Should he give up everything? Sri Ramakrishna says to the house-holders that they should give up mentally. He says, 'Hold on to God with both hands when you are not engaged in your duties. And do even your duties with one hand still holding on to His lotus feet'. And those aspirants who are not encumbered are asked to give up not only mentally but outwardly also. What happens to a man who clings to his possessions and relations is graphically described by Sri Ramakrishna: 'Even on his deathbed a person attached to his wealth, asks those around him to lower the wick of the lamp and not to waste the oil so much'.

People speak of giving up everything at the end of their life, as if it is so easy as casting off one's worn out clothes. Attachments to things grow gradually into one's skin, as it were, nay they go even deeper, they penetrate into the very marrow of one's bones, it involves one's whole being. And to think of giving up these attractions and possessions at the evening of one's life will be like having one's bones broken or breath stifled. Even when in full vigour of youth and life our thoughts revolve round our treasure chest. Is it then possible to give up that clinging when old and infirm? Let the youth not delude itself by thinking that they can devote the fag end of their life to God. We must heed the wise ones who exhort: 'Apply yourself diligently to what is auspicious, for truly, who knows when death will snatch us away'.

There can be no two opinions about the duration of life. Even a hundred and twenty years, which is perhaps the limit that a man can live healthily, is quite insufficient to fulfil all ambitions and desires in this world. That life is short, is conceded even by agnostics and atheists. It is left to man to make proper use of his life, to get beyond transmigration, to stand away from the wheel of *samsāra*. Again, if we believe in the scriptures, which are authorities in respect of all that is beyond the human ken, we have to accept that those whose actions are more akin to those of the beasts in this life are likely to take the birth of beasts in the next birth. 'By good deeds one goes to higher births and by wicked deeds to lower births and by a mixture of these one attains human birth',² says the *Praśna Upaniṣad*. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* asserts that 'persons with meritorious deeds to their credit are born as Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, or

¹ Kathopanishad, 2.10.

² Pr. Up. 3.7.

Vaishyas, (i.e. men of pious temperament) and those who are of wicked deeds are born as animals such as dogs, pigs and the like. But those who do not fall under either of these two categories tread the third path, of short-lived duration, such as insects and worms, again and again'.³

It is also reasonable to assume that whatever one constantly thinks of, that one becomes. If there are some desires in man which cannot be satisfied in man's body, it is but natural that a suitable body will have to be projected, after the dissolution of the human body, to enjoy those desires. Sri Krishna categorically declares, 'By dwelling on whatever thought one leaves the body to that form alone one goes, because of his constant contemplation on that form'.⁴ This is the reason why Sri Sankara in the beginning of the *Vivekachudamani* extols human birth so highly: 'Rare is this human birth; rarer it is to be born as a man; much more rare it is to be born with good tendencies; still more rare is the inclination towards the right conduct enunciated by the Vedas and higher than this is the erudition in the scriptures; higher than these are the faculty to discriminate between the Self and the non-Self, the experience of Brahman and continuing to be established in It. (And that is liberation.) This Liberation is not to be obtained except through the well-earned merits of a hundred crore of births.'⁵

Having been born into this imperfect world, we have to somehow get rid of the limitations placed on us on every side and in every way. And overcoming these limitations once and for all time is termed *mukti*, liberation.

From the foregoing discussion we have come to know how it is that we become bound. But in it is also the way out. If we become entangled and enmeshed by thinking of ephemeral things it naturally follows that by contemplating on the Divine, on the Supreme, on the eternally pure, on the eternally conscious, on the eternally free Being we also imbibe all these qualities in some measure until at last the lure of the phenomena fades away into the background and we begin to see that all-pervading Being everywhere.

No doubt, it is difficult to reach the goal, but on that account one should not totally neglect the path. Sri Krishna says that even a little act of righteousness saves one from a great catastrophe.⁶ Everyone in this world is not endowed with equal gifts of health, strength and intellect. So

3 Chandogya Up., V.x.7-8.

4 Gita, 8.6.

5 Vivekachudamani, 2.

6 Gita, 2.40.

each one can start in his humble way to tread the path and the easiest of all ways is the remembrance of God.

How to do it? We, every moment of our life, are doing something, imagining something or planning something. Not a moment is it possible for us to live without activity, either mental or physical. Even the laziest man will be actively dreaming of some great fortune. Inactivity is an impossibility in this world, except for a very few, whose number can be counted on the fingers' ends. 'Your very existence will be in jeopardy if you do not work',⁷ says Sri Krishna to Arjuna. Work, therefore, cannot be an excuse not to think of God. 'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever sacrifice you make, whatever gift you give, whatever austerities you perform, O son of Kunti, offer all that unto Me'⁸ stresses Sri Krishna. When you begin a work you invoke His blessings and when it ends you offer it to Him. You hanker for no results. The results are also dedicated to Him. Thus you become free from the fruits of your action. Work and its result has no more power to bind you. You have nothing to gain and nothing to lose. You are only His instrument. This attitude is most beneficial. It subdues, and if this submission is constantly practised, it even annihilates the ego.

It is not possible to remember God always if we contemplate on Him just for the sake of seeking some benefits and forget him totally afterwards. In every act and thought He must be remembered. Even what we eat is to be offered to Him. That is the time when people are apt to forget God either attracted by the savour of the food or due to other circumstances. A poet sang, 'Consider what you eat as an oblation unto the Divine Mother'. That is the attitude we have to try to cultivate. The Lord says in the Gita, 'As Vaisvanara (the stomach-fire) I live in the bodies of beings'.⁹ Here is a suggestion for our contemplation: that what we eat can be considered as an oblation unto Him.

'When you are lying down think that you are prostrating before the Lord.' When you are giving gifts think that you are offering them to God. Does He not live in all beings? This world is His creation and everything in it should remind us of Him; instead we are enamoured and caught in its glamour and forget its Creator. It is there that we miss the grip over our mind. The mind tries to take us away from our real being, away from God. Why does it do that? Because, says the Upanisad, it was created

7 Ibid., 3.8.

8 Ibid., 9.27.

9 Ibid. 15.14.

with a tendency to go outward, along with the senses.¹⁰ The senses present the mind with so many charming things and if it is not well controlled by the discriminative faculty it falls a prey to those rosy pictures and inevitably forgets God.

We make pilgrimages, make sacrifices with an ulterior motive: to obtain progeny, to enjoy the pleasures of heaven or obtain name and fame here on this earth. Well, what does all these come to? None of them, work or progeny or wealth, can set you on the path of liberation. Only by renouncing all these can man attain it.¹¹

Man, given as he is to live in the world, cannot all of a sudden obtain perfection in any method of approach to God. He must strive and struggle. There should be no letting up of efforts. It is like swimming against the current, the moment you cease your efforts you are carried down a mile or more before you are able to understand it or recover your breath. Sri Ramakrishna gives the example of a boatman to illustrate how one must struggle to see God. As long as the boat is in the winding alleys of the stream and the wind is against him, he rows and is alert, and he steers clear of the sandbanks and hidden rocks, but once he gains the main current he can leave the rowing, unfurl his sail to the favourable wind and enjoy a smoke. The main current means to be fully imbued with the thought of God, the favourable wind is God's grace. When these two things are combined nothing can disturb the devotee. He can be sure of reaching the goal.

Sri Ramakrishna in this connection cites another example: of a goldsmith at his task of melting gold. The goldsmith uses the bellows, the pipe and the fan to generate the proper heat to make the gold melt, but once he accomplishes his task, he sits back and enjoys rest as long as he needs it.

Patanjali says that one's progress in spiritual life is proportionate to the struggle that one makes. Sri Ramakrishna says that nothing can be achieved by those who say that everything will happen in time and do no practice at all.

A doubt may arise here: Men have practised long and arduously before having a glimpse of God. Is it then possible to see God by merely practising His presence or remembering Him constantly? Well, there have been saints who attained that state merely through the remembrance of God. But their remembrance was genuine. To use an expression of Sri Ramakrishna, there was 'no theft in the chamber of their heart'. They

10 Kathopanisad, 4.1.

11 Kaivalyopanisad, I.3.

gave themselves up wholly, without any reservation, to Him.

Remembrance of God may appear as an insignificant practice, worth not the trouble. But if we think a little deeper we will come to know that it is not so easy as it appears to be. Engaged in the duties of the world man forgets God completely. And even if he takes His name, the lips only might move, but the heart would not be touched. Its adoration will be somewhere else. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell a story to illustrate this point: Once Narada, who was proud of being a great devotee of the Lord, went to Vaikuntha (the abode of Narayana). The Lord coming to know of Narada's thought said, 'Narada, go to such and such a place. A great devotee of mine lives there. Cultivate his acquaintance; for he is truly devoted to Me'. Narada went there and found a farmer who rose early in the morning, pronounced the name of Hari (God) only once, and taking his plough, went out and tilled the ground all day long. At night he went to bed after pronouncing the name of Hari once more. Narada said to himself: 'How can this rustic be a lover of God? I see him busily engaged in worldly duties, and he has no signs of a pious man about him'. He went back to the Lord and spoke what he thought of his new acquaintance. Thereupon the Lord said: 'Narada, take this cup of oil and go round this city and come back with it. But take care that you do not spill even a single drop of it'. Narada did as he was told, and on his return the Lord asked him, 'Well, how many times did you remember Me in the course of your walk round the city?' 'Not once, my Lord', said Narada 'and how could I, when I had to watch this cup brimming over with oil?' The Lord then said: 'This one cup of oil did so divert your attention that even you did forget Me altogether. But look at that rustic, who, though carrying the heavy burden of a family, still remembers Me twice every day'. Our devotion is not judged by what we profess but by the way we live. The Lord looks into the heart of the devotee and does not judge merely by what he outwardly does. If there is no consonance between the inside and out, the practices one does cannot yield the desired results. Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth should speak and out of the fullness of the heart also the hands should act. True remembrance makes a god of man. His very proximity makes those near him feel the presence of the Most High. Such remembrance, however, comes after a long period of *sadhana* and is born out of the true love of God. Nevertheless this method is open to all, the high and the low, the poor and the rich. Let us practise it and be blessed.

WHAT DOES TAKE MAN AWAY FROM GOD

Swami Paratparananda

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INDIAN psychologists of old were aware that man's senses were not infallible, nay they were definite that the senses were easily fooled by Dame Nature. They knew that something stood between us and the thing experienced and made us perceive them in a different state. In the *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* we come across a passage where the author enumerates the several reasons due to which man cannot perceive objects. These same reasons may be given as to why we see the world not as it is but in quite another way. The passage runs thus: "Due to extreme distance, extreme proximity, deformity of the receiving senses, an unreceptive mind, subtlety, veiling, suppression and becoming one with what is similar, non-perception is possible."¹ We can in the light of scientific discoveries add some more reasons for our not being well posted with the exact situation we are in. Take the natural phenomena, for example the rising of the sun. According to science the expression itself is faulty. Science says that the earth moves round the sun as also on its own axis and therefore, the days and nights, the months and seasons result. But the common man's idea of rising and setting of the sun is naive, not in consonance with the scientific explanation, yet it is in vogue. Similarly man — aver the scientists of the soul, the Rishis, the saints — does not see himself as what he truly is. The sublime experience of these sages was that the one Brahman has become all these: our own self, these creatures and all that is seen in the universe. The *Chāṇdogya Upaniṣad* says: 'It (Brahman) thought, let Me be many'.² Again, 'this same deity thought that let Me entering into these devatas (viz. fire, water and earth) by means of the living self, (*jīva*) manifest as name and form'.³ There are many passages in the Śruti which assert this type of relation between the *jīva* and Brahman or God.

The question now is why do we not perceive this relation. What prevents us from experiencing it? This has been the quest of philosophers

¹ S.K., 7.

² Chandogya, VI.ii.3.

³ Ibid., VI.iii.2.

and seers through the ages and this is the real purpose of religion: to find out who we are, from whence we came and where we go. The Advaitin will tell you that it is due to *avidyā*, ignorance that you see variety in unity, and *avidyā* has been variously described. Sri Ramakrishna has given us a simpler definition of this *avidyā*. He used to say egotism in man is *avidyā*. Another time he said it was lust and lucre. It stands between us and God. Now a doubt may arise: Is then this *avidyā* more powerful than God as to come between Him and us? The answer has been given by Sri Ramakrishna himself. He says, 'It is not so. Even a tiny thing can veil a great object'. He cited the example of the sun — which we know is very much larger than the earth itself — which can be prevented from being seen by a flying piece of cloud. Can we on that account say that the cloud is more powerful than the sun? The cloud owes its very existence to the sun and not the other way about. An effect can never be greater than the cause. Sri Ramakrishna further drove home this truth by holding a piece of cloth between himself and the audience. He said, 'You cannot see me now because of this veil. Such is *avidyā*, such is the nature of egoism'. It hides the true nature of the world and even of oneself.

II

How can we overcome this egoism? If we have to proceed scientifically, first of all we must know what it constitutes. The Upaniṣads speak of the *jīva* as endowed with the five sheaths, the *pañcakōśas* — the *annamaya*, *prāṇamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijñānamaya* and *ānandamaya*. The very idea that these are termed sheaths shows that they are not the real thing. We know the scabbard is not the sword, it is but a receptacle for the sword. Likewise these *Kōśas* are not the self, not the Atman. But as the scabbard is a necessary accoutrement for the carrying of the sword, so these *Kōśas* are necessary for the purpose of transit of the soul through the world of experience back to its own nature.

The above *Kōśas* are sometimes regrouped and named as the *sthūla* (gross), *sūkṣma* (subtle), and *kāraṇa* (causal) bodies. The *annamaya kōśa* is the gross visible body; the *prāṇamaya*, *manomaya* and *vijñānamaya kōśas* constitute the subtle body and the *ānandamaya kōśa* forms the causal body. In this regrouping or reclassification though the word sheath has been dropped, the substitute used, viz. *śarīra*, body, has not much more respect in Indian philosophy than the word sheath. Sri Krishna in the *Gītā* likens the body to a garment. 'Just as man discards the worn-out

garments and puts on other new ones, similarly the *jīva* (*dehī*) discarding the old and decrepit bodies takes on other new ones.⁴ There is the *śarīrī*, the dweller in the body, for whom the body is the house. A house is not built for its own sake, nor for mere architectural beauty, but for some one who wants a habitation. By itself it has no value. Only because someone dwells in a house it is worth all the trouble and the labour and the cost. Likewise the body is worth less than the dust of which it is made as soon as the indweller leaves it. Yet such is the infatuation, that the indweller identifies himself with the body and forgets himself. This superimposition of the insentient body on the conscious entity (the self) and vice versa, i.e. the admixture of truth and falsehood is the natural basis, says Śrī Śankara, of all the transactions in this world.⁵ Not to know about this is what constitutes ignorance, and identification of oneself with any of the three bodies above cited is what is called the ego (*ahamkāra*).

The range of this ego is very vast. As if not satisfied with the embellishments of these bodies it takes on new ones. There are the *upādhis*, the limiting adjuncts which further cramp our soul when it gets attached to them. There is scholarship, and there is wealth. There is name and fame, property and progeny. If these *upādhis* are not properly used they are sure to use man improperly. Instead of the dog wagging the tail, the tail will wag the dog as the saying goes. Each one of this is enough to swell the ego to infinite proportions and when such a thing happens there remains but very small space for the Ātman to occupy, for God to manifest. For by whatever name we call that Conscious Principle, according to our leaning towards Advaita or Dvaita, it has to be accepted on the grounds of authority of Śruti and Smṛiti that this Principle lives in man. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* says, 'He who lives in all beings but is within them, whom no beings know, whose body is all beings and who controls all beings from within, is the Internal Ruler, that is your own immortal self'.⁶ 'The Lord, O Arjuna, dwells in the heart of all beings and makes them move by His power, Māyā, as if mounted on a machine,'⁷ says Sri Krishna. Even such a Being we are neglecting and accumulating tinsel and burying ourselves into the heap of scrap to such an extent that for all practical purposes the Ātman in us sinks almost into insignificance. As someone referring to the Upaniṣadic passages, humorously said, 'because of man's preoccupation with the other things of the world the

⁴ Bhagavad Gita, II.22.

⁵ Br. Sutra Bhashya, Introduction.

⁶ Br. Up. III.vii.15.

⁷ Bhagavad Gita, XVIII.61.

Ātman has entered into a very secret place and hidden Itself⁸ in the smallest space in the heart.⁹ It is afraid to be seen by unholy eyes'. What happens by this process of increasing our accretions is that the thickness of the veil that we project between ourselves and God increases, until it becomes too opaque for us to have any glimpse of Him. It takes the shape of a wall, a barrier too thick to penetrate.

An impressive example as to how the ego of wealth acts was given by Sri Ramakrishna. He said, 'If a thief steals ten rupees from a rich man's house and is caught, the owner exclaims, "what to steal from my house!" First he takes away the stolen money, gives the thief a good beating and not satisfied with that hands him over to the police'. Why does this happen? Because the rich man had identified himself with his wealth. That is the ego of wealth. Sri Krishna describes this as *āsuri sampat*, demoniacal traits in man, thus: 'This I have acquired now; this desire I shall soon have; this wealth is mine, the other also will soon become mine. That enemy of mine I have already killed and shall slay others as well. I am the Lord; I am the enjoyer; I have attained everything that can be coveted, am powerful and happy. I am richly endowed with wealth; I am of noble birth; who else is equal to me? I will perform sacrifice; I shall give gifts; I shall sport'.¹⁰

III

How to overcome this ego that prevents us from seeing God? The Upaniṣads prescribe the method of discrimination. What is it that sees and perceives things in this world? It is the Conscious Principle, the Ātman that perceives, whereas in the world it is believed that the aggregate of the mind, senses and body is the seer, is the experiencer. 'That which is the ear of the ear, mind of the mind, speech of the speech, it is the vital force of *prāṇa*, and eye of the eye. The wise man distinguishes It from these faculties and rising above sense-life becomes immortal,'¹¹ says the *Kenopaniṣad*. From this it is clear that it is not the eye that sees, but that which keeps the eye alive; it is not the mind that thinks but that which keeps the mind alert. And that resides in all beings and makes them live, move and have their being and that is God. The *Kathopaniṣad* affirms this stand tirelessly and denies experience to every other faculty or entity. 'Realizing the One, which sees the things that are in the dream and things

⁸ Kathopanishad, II.12. and III.12.

⁹ Chandogya Up., VIII.i.1.

¹⁰ Bhagavad Gita, XVI.13 to 15.

¹¹ Kenopanishad, I.2.

that are in the waking, as the Great Omnipresent Being, a wise man does not grieve.¹² 'The meaning is obvious. That which is in us and takes note of things in the waking state as well as in the dream, that is the Omnipresent Being, God. And realizing it as such one does not have any sorrow. As another Upaniṣad remarks, 'Where is infatuation, where is sorrow for him who sees oneness everywhere and knows that his Atman alone has become all beings?'¹³ It is very near to us, yet very far.¹⁴ It is very far for those who get engrossed in the world. They have to travel a long distance before they can reach or see Him. But it is very near to those who have discrimination, who know that it is God alone that exists in so many forms. For them it is there inside every being as well as outside of them.¹⁵ When these ideas are repeatedly forced upon the mind and when it learns to assimilate this fact and make it its own, be one with that idea, then man has made some progress towards his ideal, towards God.

But this discrimination is to be preceded by the discrimination of what is real and what is unreal. First we have to discover, we have to ask ourselves whether riches, the outward possessions — name and fame — are they real? Then comes what we most prize, the body. Is that eternal? No it is not. Now when we say that one thing is ephemeral, something of an opposite nature is accepted as existing always. So there is something eternal compared to this existence. Man clings to things here because they are tangible to him and he thinks he can hold on to them. But when he comes to know the true value of things he longs to reach a more permanent abode. He hears about the enjoyments in heaven and seeks for them as they are more lasting than those on the earth. But that is not the goal. The heaven is only this world of senses multiplied, a thousand or million fold if you like, but when the enjoyments in heaven which were earned through merits of actions done here, come to an end, as the merits are exhausted, there comes the fall. Therefore the seers advise that even heaven is not the goal. So one who hankers after peace and true immortality, should see God, seek the knowledge of Brahman. Such a person should have intense dispassion for enjoyment here, and hereafter. When for a long time, without let or hindrance, ceaseless efforts are made in this direction then the knowledge of the Atman dawns, then the ego dies its natural death. It has no more power to bring one back into this world. For the fruits of action, which bring man into

¹² Kathopanishad, IV.4.

¹³ Isavasya Up., 7.

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵ Ibid.

being, are then completely burnt out.¹⁶ They become impotent to fructify, to bring about a further birth for that person just as the fried seed is unable to germinate.

IV

Now this path can be followed by very few chosen persons. Their number is a microscopic minority. What is the way for the common man? Sri Ramakrishna says, 'This ego is like the peepal tree, very difficult to get rid of. Cut it down today, tomorrow again it puts forth its shoot. So let this intractable ego remain like the servant. Then it cannot do you any harm. "I am the servant of God". This ego is not harmful'. But then one has to serve the devotees of God and learn from them the way to reach Him. Such a man's riches are put to the service of the Lord and His devotees. He may give in charity but that does not inflate his ego. On the other hand he is happy that he has been the instrument in the hand of God to serve His creatures. It is the Lord that commands him and he is there only as His servant. When one can truly cultivate this attitude one gets rid of one's unripe ego, as Sri Ramakrishna calls it. The ripe ego either knows that everything is Brahman, everything is from God, and lives in Him, or that it is only His servant and as a servant cannot pride himself on the achievements attained through him by his Master, the Lord, this ripe ego too has nothing to show off and therefore remains meek and subservient to God's will. These are the two ways of overcoming the ego. In this case of surrender, of remaining as a servant, what we call, *Karma yoga* also plays a great part. Men have to work, completely effacing their egos, and without the least idea of any return. It is only for the pleasure of the Lord that they have to work and not to claim any rewards therefrom. Such a man's mind should always be plunged in God to know His will and act up to it. Bhakti or devotion does not free man from his obligations in the world. Rather they make him fulfil these obligations more conscientiously and meticulously than before. Thus doing every thing for God, establishing one's mind in Him, bowing down to Him and fully dedicating oneself to Him, one is able to tear down the veil of this ego and stand before His resplendent presence.¹⁷ This is the way for going back to Him from whom for a short while we have the feeling that we are separate. This experience is like the divided appearance the ocean presents when a stick is floating on it, while all the time it is one and undivided. Such is the nature of the ego. Penetrating and knowing it as such we go beyond it and reach Him.

¹⁶ Bhagavad Gita, IV.37.

¹⁷ Ibid., IX.34.

CONTENTMENT AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

Swami Paratparananda

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THE first hurdle that man faces in spiritual life is his mind. It is a formidable hurdle but at the same time a very delicate one. It requires careful handling. The nature of the mind is fickle. Even a world-conqueror may be but a slave to his mind. The speed of the mind is said to be the fastest that can be thought of. It moves so fast, now it is here and in a moment it may be thinking of the remotest part of the globe. Again it is like a double-edged sword which cuts both ways. It can kill or save a man, spiritually speaking. So one has to be very dextrous in using it.

Further, it is not possible to measure the fickleness of the mind. If you happen to visit a menagerie you will notice the restlessness that is manifested in the caged beings, — especially the wild animals like bears, tigers and lions — moving round and round their cages. The agitated state of monkeys is proverbial to need repetition. The human mind is more restive and restless than all these. Swami Vivekananda once said that the mind is like a mad monkey, intoxicated with liquor and bitten by a scorpion. The agitation that goes on in such a monkey is inconceivable. Naturally prone to fidgetiness, madness increases its unrest enormously. What then will be its state if it becomes drunk and is bitten by scorpion? Can we have any idea of it? Its unrest cannot even be imagined. We will surely pity such a creature. Yet that is the very nature of an uncultivated, uncultured and uncontrolled mind. It flies from enjoyment to enjoyment. Even in sleep it is pestered with the impressions that it receives in the waking and is forced to project a thousand and one pictures of pleasure. One thing, however, that prevents the mind from perpetual dreaming is its being confronted by the painful side also. That is what breaks the dream and that is, again, what breaks our waking dream also.

The first thing, therefore, that we have to learn is that this fickleness will not do, that discontentment is the mire in which we get stuck up, that ambition is a trait that projects a fast receding goal, an *ignis fatuus*. Maybe ambition is all right for those who immerse them-

selves in materialism. But it does not bring them happiness. On the contrary it pours into them the poison of disquietude, a hankering that becomes unsatiable. Sri Ramakrishna's advice to a devotee in this connection can be noted with profit. Adhar Chandra Sen when he came to Sri Ramakrishna was holding the post of a deputy magistrate, a post that carried prestige in those days. He became much attached to Sri Ramakrishna and the Master too loved him. Adhar sometimes used to come straight from his office to Dakshineswar, lest he should miss the Master's company if he went home. Even such a devoted man had once asked Sri Ramakrishna to pray to the Divine Mother, that he could get the post of vice-chairman of the Calcutta Municipality. Let us quote here what the Master said about it.

Master (*to Adhar*): 'Didn't you get the job?'

In order to secure the job, Adhar had interviewed many influential people in Calcutta.

Master (*to 'M' and Niranjan*): 'Hazra said to me, "Please pray to the Divine Mother for Adhar, that he may secure the job." Adhar made the same request to me. I said to the Mother: "O Mother, Adhar has been visiting You. May he get the job if it pleases You." But at the same time I said to Her, "How small-minded he is! He is praying to You for things like that and not for Knowledge and Devotion."' "

(*To Adhar*): 'Why did you dance attendance on all those small-minded people? You have seen so much; you have heard so much! After reading the entire *Ramayana*, to ask whose wife Sita is!

'Be satisfied with the job you have. People hanker after a post paying fifty or a hundred rupees, and you are earning three hundred rupees! . . . Serve him whom you are already serving. The mind becomes soiled by serving but one master. And to serve five masters!'

To call out such strong remarks from the Master two things were necessary: the Master's interest in the welfare of the devotee and his urge to point out to one and all the gaping chasm that awaits a spiritual aspirant, if he entertains worldly ambitions. There is no end to man's desire and no satisfying of all of them even if the whole world with all that is in it were his. There is no satisfaction in the enjoyment that comes from wealth and the like. Peace comes from contentment and contentment from being satisfied with whatever one has got.

II

Why do we hear from every spiritual master that we have to give up worldly thoughts if we are earnest in seeking God? Christ said to a rich

man, who had asked to be initiated into the life of religion, 'Sell everything you have, give it to the poor and then follow me'. Sri Ramakrishna said 'lust and gold' are the two impediments in the path of a spiritual seeker. The Upanisads too are categorical in their declaration, 'Neither by actions, nor by progeny and wealth, but by renunciation alone some attained liberation.'¹ Why is this so? Can there not be a *via media*? Knowing Brahman alone one goes beyond death; there is not any other path² declare the Vedas. Because, first of all, the world is such a subject that it engrosses the whole of man's mind once he gets into it. Worldly goods can so tangibly be grasped and palpably felt and perceived that it requires a very keen intellect to see in and through the kaleidoscope of this world. That the world, like a kaleidoscope, is but a glass tube with some glass pieces in it, worth nothing, yet lure people of immature minds again and again, is a fact that is discerned by a very few, a microscopic minority.

Secondly, a mind that is given to the world is always restless and an agitated mind is not the proper medium, not the proper ground, for the reflection of God's image. Arjuna, the hero, of many a battle confesses that the mind is, even as air, very difficult to control³. It is a common phenomenon, which is within the experience of every one, that the still waters alone, can properly reflect the objects near it, for example, the landscape on its banks. It is only the crystal clear water, which remains undisturbed or which does not rush at great speed, that discovers to us its bed with its myriad-hued stones and the life it holds in its womb. The case of the mind is very much analogous to this. Unless the mind is calm we cannot find out what is there behind it. Unless it is pure the reflection of the Most High is impossible. That is why the Upanisads ask us to ward off thoughts other than about God. They affirm that way alone lies the bridge to immortality.⁴

III

The Hindus believe that man comes into this world to reap the fruits of his past actions. They lie in seed form, in the form of propensities or tendencies, in his mind and bide their time and spurt out when conditions become favourable. They are like the germs of diseases that remain dormant until the body in which they abide gets weak; then they attack with full vigour. The remedy, therefore, as in the case of the body, lies in

¹ Kaivalyopanishad, 1.3.

² Svetasvataropanishad, 3.8.

³ Bhagavad Gita, VI.34.

⁴ Mundakopanishad, 2.2.5.

keeping the mind strong, that is to say, wary and watchful. Man is naturally upset if he faces a too bitter or elating experience. This perturbation makes him lose his faculty of discrimination and commit some folly, which he may regret afterwards. It is for this reason that poise of the mind has been so much stressed upon in the *Gita*. 'He who does not get elated, nor hates; neither grieves nor desires, gives up both good and evil, and is full of devotion, he is dear to Me.'⁵ 'The serenity of mind, kindness, silence, self-control and purity of thought — this is said to be mental austerity.'⁶

Austerity or Tapas is a thing which is almost forgotten in the present age. The modern trend is to give free reins to the mind, and senses. People can brook no restraint on their actions, neither have they control over themselves. They are content to be carried away on the tide of their emotions. They never stop to think of the *pros* and *cons* of their actions; selfishness rules supreme. In short, man is becoming more and more extrovert, the very nature which goes to make mind fidgety and restless. In the wake of this restlessness man rushes after more and newer pleasures until at last he runs up a blind alley, but having failed to cultivate the power to withdraw into himself, he, by the very momentum of his propensities, impinges against the wall, as it were. For given to a way of life that he is no more able to sustain, man loses his mental balance, becomes a neurotic. Therefore, to avoid this danger it is good for every one to practise a little introspection, a little withdrawal from the mad world of the senses.

Sri Krishna in the verse quoted above speaks of serenity of the mind. How can the mind be serene when we feed it and fill it every moment of our life with disturbing and distracting material? The way does not lie in pursuing these distractions but avoiding them. The worldly-wise may indict such a person of escapism but if he desires his own good he should not heed such meaningless chatter. Saner advice is to avoid such temptations. Sri Ramakrishna said that the temptations to man are as pickles to a typhoid patient. They should be kept out of sight.

IV

Having found out the nature of the mind, we should try to seek means to counteract its harmful trends. We have known now that there are lust, anger, greed, hatred, jealousy and pride, lurking in us and that these are deadly enemies of man. These are to be overcome, to be

⁵ Bhagavad Gita, XII.17.

⁶ IBID., XVII.16.

vanquished if we want tranquillity of mind, if we desire peace and bliss. How to do it? Patanjali suggests that a wave of opposite nature should be set against each of these whenever any of them tries to raise its head.⁷ Jesus, as it were, reflects the very thoughts when he says, 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.'⁸ When a wave of anger rises smother it with the thought of love. When hatred gushes out arouse the virtue of kindness. Do so every time a wrong thought oppresses you. But this is possible if we constantly and assiduously cultivate the virtues such as kindliness, humility, dispassion and the like. A question may crop up here: What is the necessity of cultivating these virtues? Is it not enough if we send a wave of contrary nature when the evil thought arises? It is not so easy as that. Life is a struggle; it is a war between the lower and higher natures in man. The lower nature is always strong. We have heard in the Puranas how the Devas, were most of the time defeated by the Danavas and God had to come to their rescue every time. This fight goes on within us too. The demons of evil inclinations are always alert to undermine our Godward life. So our weapons are to be trim, ready and formidable to give fight to these foes. The virtues are our weapons here, and, therefore, are required to be practised continuously until they become a part and parcel of our nature. Then alone can we be sure of defeating the wicked inclinations.

Sri Ramakrishna gives us another method to overcome these evil propensities. 'Direct the passions to God. The impulse of *lust* should be turned into the desire to have intercourse with Atman. Feel *angry* at those who stand in your way to God. Feel *greedy* for Him. If you must have the feeling of *I and mine*, then associate it with God. Say, for instance, "My Rama, my Krishna." If you must have *pride*, then feel like Vibhishana, who said, "I have touched the feet of Rama with my head; I will not bow this head before anyone else."⁹ Such constant remembrance of God changes the whole fabric of that person's mind. The passions then no more trouble him. He becomes contented and tranquil. He becomes dear to the Lord. 'A Yogi who is always contented, whose passions are under control, who is of firm determination, and whose mind and intellect are given unto Me and is devoted to Me, he is dear to Me.'¹⁰ 'He, by whom the world is not troubled and who is not troubled by the world, who is free

⁷ Yoga Sutras, II.33.

⁸ St. Mathew, 5. 43-44.

⁹ The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p.155 (1948).

¹⁰ Bhagavad Gita, XII.14.

from elation, anger, fear and anxiety — he is dear to Me.¹¹ To be noticed by the Lord and to be loved by Him, the devotee should make his heart pure, devoid of all other attachments. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.' Purity of heart is achieved by excluding all other thoughts and making it one-pointed; then alone contentment comes. And contentment is the precursor of Knowledge, of the descent of God into man's heart.

Here we may be asked: Is God partial then? Why is every one not dear to Him? The *Gita* has given us the answer. 'The Lord does not accept anyone's demerits or merits; but knowledge (that the Lord is same to all) is covered by ignorance; because of this they get deluded. But those whose ignorance has been destroyed by the knowledge of the Self — their knowledge, like the sun, manifests that highest Being.'¹² So it is not that God is partial but that we do not need Him. Whatever we yearn for that is given to us. If we seek the things of the world we get them but along with them will come the evils of the world too. A popular story that we come across in the Puranas may well illustrate this fact. Once when the gods had lost their everything to the demons and were sorely dejected, Lord Vishnu told them to churn the Milk Ocean to produce nectar, drinking which the mortals would become immortal. A sort of a pact was patched up between the two quarrelling parties, viz., the gods and the demons, for this purpose and making Vasuki, a huge serpent, the rope, Mandara mountain the churning rod, they churned the Milk Ocean. But the first thing to come out was not nectar but a virulent poison, the very breeze of which suffocated and made the lives of the gods and demons alike miserable. The gods then took refuge in Shiva and prayed to him to save them from that torture. The story says that the great God drank the poison and relieved the universe of its misery. Many other things came out of that great effort but nectar was the last to be produced. This story tells us that things coveted here are not unmixed with misery. Pleasure and pain go together; one who accepts pleasure must accept pain also; he cannot avoid it. Sri Krishna says in the *Gita*, 'The happiness, that is derived from the contact of the senses with their objects, which tastes like nectar in the beginning but in effect works like poison is of *rajasic* nature'.¹³ On the other hand that happiness which in the beginning savours like poison but in effect works like nectar that is called the *sattvic* joy and is born out of the tranquillity and purity of the mind.¹⁴ Knowing this we should pray and strive to attain purity of heart.

¹¹ Bhagavad Gita, XII.15.

¹² Ibid., V. 15 & 16.

¹³ Ibid., XVIII.38.

¹⁴ Ibid., XVIII.37.

V

There is, however, one discontentment, one restlessness which is not harmful for a spiritual aspirant, viz. divine discontent: restlessness to see God, eagerness to feel His presence. This restlessness on the contrary is an antidote to the other. Here there is no straying away from our moorings. It is rather a gathering back into the fold, a going home. But this discontent comes to one in a million, after years of austerity and practice. Ordinary people have to plod on and try to still the lower type of discontent. For the former discontent leads you towards God and the latter entangles you into the world. Remembering this let us exert our bit to free ourselves from this bondage, from this *Samsara*.

HOW TO PUT PAIN TO A BENEFICIAL USE

Swami Paratparananda

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As adversity proves the mettle of man pain brings him out in his true colours, as it were. It is at a time when man is overwhelmed with pain, physical or mental, that one can gauge his character. High sounding philosophy one may preach but how one lives it in life and that too when overcome by calamities does in a great measure sum him up. None can deny that this world is an experience of pairs of opposites, love and hatred, pleasure and pain, sympathy and jealousy, co-operation and competition and so on. One of these pairs is acceptable but the other is unpalatable. The wheel of time, however, stops not to suit anyone's taste. It moves on and along with it sorrow and happiness too move into every man's life in succession, sometimes in rapid movement, sometimes slowly. There is no escape from this wheel for anyone.

Every one knows this: knows that youth and vigour are short-lived, that death succeeds birth as sure as night follows day. But the atheist, the agnostic and the materialist tell us to 'make hay while the sun shines', enjoy most when you can. They, however, forget or deliberately omit to add, 'and suffer while you cannot'. Aye, that is a verifiable phenomenon. Man is not even able to suffer patiently, having spent all his energy in enjoyment. If we keep open our eyes and ears and observe, we shall find how those who rush madly into the vortex of unbridled enjoyment find themselves left high and dry by the very senses that dragged them into it, when suffering relentlessly pursues them. Man's senses are like the fair-weather friends, letting you to fend for yourself when misery overtakes you; that is to say, pursuit of pleasure impoverishes man and makes him unfit to face life as it changes, — the least pain, the least misery, exasperates him

Again, as we have already seen, the very texture of this web of life is such that misery and happiness form its warp and woof and one cannot exist without the other. Pain cannot be ignored, for it presses itself on to the forefront and makes itself felt. Denying it has no meaning, nor suffering it as an inevitable evil bring us any credit. In an age where

utility takes the pride of place among the incentives to man's action he must try to see what best use he can make of pain. To what use can misery be put? When we know it is sure to come in spite of all our efforts to avoid it, we must get prepared to accept it with equanimity. How can this be done? By remembering that pain, like pleasure, is shortlived and bearing it without much ado, by taking it in our stride. That is what Sri Krishna taught Arjuna. 'The sense contacts, O Arjuna, result in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, but they are coming and going and are impermanent, therefore endure them.'¹ This endurance (*titiksha*) is one of the six qualities that are mentioned by the seers as the equipment that is incumbent in our journey towards the Highest. Endurance has been defined as, 'bearing of all afflictions without caring to redress them and at the same time being free from anxiety or lament on their account'.² If it is asked how to reach such a state when we are in the region of its antipodes, there is but one answer. And that is: by practice. We may remind ourselves of what Sri Krishna told Arjuna regarding the control of the mind: *abhyasa* and *Vairagya*, practice and detachment, he said, were the only way to do it. In every way of life, in every pursuit it is practice that makes us perfect. If you want to swim no amount of reading books on swimming can help you to learn it. One must get into water and struggle. A life-belt may help you in the beginning but if you depend on it always you may not drown but you will never learn to swim. A strong desire backed by immense exertion alone can achieve success in any walk of life. So also is the case with a religious aspirant. For him practice of virtues is a supreme necessity, being a step forward towards his goal. Now, to reach that state of calm acceptance or indifference to pain and pleasure we have to fall back upon something which we know to be more than all these little flashes of joys and sorrows, to be everlasting, eternal. But simple knowledge alone does not help. An awareness of that spirit in every day life and faith in its redeeming power are also necessary.

Pain makes us aware that life in this world is not a smooth sailing; there are tempests and gales which are to be faced. It makes us conscious that there is a power which is beyond all comprehension, yet controls our destiny. To the forgetful man it is a warning that something unpleasant awaits him always round the corner. It is a lesson that men should learn but unfortunately, generally, do not. But those who do are not afraid of afflictions. They come to understand that along with distress there comes from that same source the power to endure, if only they have the faith. There is a prayer of Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas,

¹ Bhagavad Gita, II.14.

² Vivekachudamani, 24.

the heroes of the *Mahabharata*, which bears ample testimony to this fact: 'Let afflictions come to us always, O Lord, so that we may be able to behold you again and again. For beholding you results in effectively cutting off all further births'.³ Is such a prayer incompatible with healthy living? Is it melancholy of the morbid type?

It is possible to pass off hilarity and affected cheerfulness to be a healthy way of living. But is that a fact? No, hilarity brings in depression in its wake and affected cheerfulness, to borrow an expression from Swami Vivekananda, is putting roses over the festering sores, and calling it beautiful. There is a criterion by which one can judge whether the pessimism of a religious aspirant is that of a sick soul or what is born out of the penetrating wisdom which pierces through the hollowness of all the transient things of the world. The pessimism of such a person does not invade those around with defeatism, nor is he himself overcome by helplessness. Kunti along with her sons had to pass through ordeals and vicissitudes which many a staunch optimist would have shrunk away from, or in facing which would have gone under. But they withstood all and were prepared for the next fling of fortune with calm, but not slavish, resignation. There was dignity in their suffering. Their life does not make us hopeless but infuses strength and faith in ourselves. Under such circumstances can we call the prayer of Kunti a morbid taste for suffering? On the other hand, those who can see, will find in it a direct challenge to destiny: to do what it might and see whether they are found wanting. Such undaunted spirit surely cannot be engendered by brooding over the injuries and insults one has suffered from. That is the spirit which almost comes near the description of a person of 'steady intellect' of the *Gita*. 'Unmoved in affliction, unattached to pleasures, devoid of attachment, fear and anger, such a sage is said to be of steady wisdom.'⁴ So this imputation of morbidity does not hold good in their case, as also in the case of other sages and saints who had to pass through similar circumstances.

Sometimes pain becomes the foreteller of a great event in a person's life; a metamorphosis, as it were, happens in one's outlook on life. It has happened in the case of those who later became great saints. A waylaying robber was shocked into awakening that his very near and dear ones were not ready to share the burden of his sins which he committed in order to maintain them. There was no physical pain but what mental anguish he must have passed through! And the result was the emergence of a brilliant sage who has made himself immortal by his

³ Bhagavata, I.8.25.

⁴ Gita, II.56.

great epic, the *Ramayana*. Another was the commentator on the *Gita* and the *Bhagavata*, Sridharaswami. Thrown into misery by the passing away of his wife, Sridhara did not weep or wail but was stunned. The veils of delusion were forcibly torn away from before his mind's eye. The whole play of this worldly phenomena became an open book for him and there and then he renounced. The example of Buddha is a household word to need repetition. He was moved by the suffering in the world, though its burning flames had not personally touched him. Instances can be multiplied but we presume these are sufficient for our purpose.

II

Just at the beginning of this century there was a movement prevalent in some of the Western countries which was called the religion of healthy-mindedness. Prof. William James, the great Psychologist of his time, refers to this movement in one of his Gifford Lectures⁵ wherein he cites many instances where cures had been effected in the case of several ailments by this religion of healthy-mindedness, where man naturally refused to be intimidated into thinking of evil or pain. If we carefully and critically go through the instances that he cites we find that it was the trust in God more often than mere optimism that could buoy the practicans up and save them from sinking into the morass of distress. These people had found out that moping and whining and weeping is not the way to face pain, but to create a positive approach: to refuse to be cowed down by misery and put trust in the ultimate good.

Should we then be unfeeling like stock and stone? Sri Ramakrishna gives us the answer. Once a gentleman who had lost his eldest son was brought to Sri Ramakrishna for consolation in his afflicted state of mind Sri Ramakrishna first sang a song which called for alertness and vigilance against death:

'To arms! To arms, O man! Death storms your house in battle array!

Bearing the quiver of knowledge, mount the chariot of devotion;
Bend the bow of your tongue with the bow-string of love,
And aim at him the shaft of Mother Kali's holy name.
Here is a ruse for the fray: You need no chariot or charioteer:
Fight your foe from the Ganges' bank and he is easily slain.'

Then he said: 'What can you do? Be ready for Death. Death has

⁵ Collected in book form entitled the *Varieties of Religious Experience*

entered the house. You must fight him with the weapon of God's holy name. God alone is the Doer. I say: "O Lord, I do as Thou doest through me. I speak as Thou speakest through me. I am the machine and Thou art the Operator. I am the house and Thou art the Indweller. I am the engine and Thou art the Engineer." Give your power of attorney to God. One doesn't come to grief through letting a good man assume one's responsibilities. Let His will be done.

'But isn't your grief for your son only natural? The son is one's own self reborn. Lakshmana ran to Ravana when the latter fell dead on the battle-field. Looking at Ravana's body, he found that every one of his bones was full of holes. Thereupon he said to Rama: "O Rama, glory be to Your arrows! There is no spot in Ravana's body that they have not pierced." "Brother," replied Rama, "the holes you see in his bones are not from my arrows. Grief for his sons has pierced them through and through. These holes are the marks of his grief. It has penetrated his very bones."

'But house, wife, and children are all transitory; they have only a momentary existence. The palm-tree alone is real. One or two fruits have dropped off. Why lament?

'God is engaged in three kinds of activity: creation, preservation and destruction. Death is inevitable. All will be destroyed at the time of dissolution. Nothing will remain.'

What do we gather from this advice of the Master? It does not decry man's feeling for his kith and kin, on the other hand it is unnatural to be unfeeling, but at the same time it stresses that separation from the near and dear ones and anguish on that account cannot be eliminated from this world; that the only way to go beyond pain is to have recourse to God, who is the repose of all. He makes our burden lighter. Did not Jesus declare, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'?⁶ This is the message of hope that you hear from all God-men.

III

Summing up we have that pain is an inevitable ingredient in the life of beings. It can be countenanced effectively first of all by discrimination, through the knowledge that pain being transient cannot be everlasting; secondly by turning the bitter experience to profit by making us dive deep into ourselves, or, if you like to call it so, to turn Godward. There is a passage in the *Mundaka Upanisad* which speaks of the nature of the *jiva* and how it transcends from its lower nature to the higher. 'Two birds of

⁶ St. Mathew, XI,28.

bright plumage, always associated, closely cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit while the other looks on without eating. Seated on the self-same tree, the *jīva* moans bewildered by his impotence to overcome grief and his limitations. But when he sees the other, the Lord, worshipped by all and His glory, he then becomes free from grief.⁷ That is the way to overcome the sting that is in misery.

⁷ III.i.1-2.

HOW TO CALL ON GOD

Swami Paratparananda

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A FEELING of non-response, insufficient response, or response not commensurate with one's efforts oppresses every aspirant some time or other, for a shorter or longer duration in the course of his spiritual life. This is sometimes called the 'dark night' of the soul. This happens to be the crucial point in the spiritual career of man. Doubts then arise as to whether he really has chosen the right track; whether after all God and visions and things like that could not have been chimerical, illusory, without any substance, induced by fasting and the resultant metabolic process — a fevered brain — or by drugs, as some of the present day psycho-analysts persistently argue and want to prove. In some this doubting condition happens to be a passing phase but in some others it has a severe reaction. They give up their efforts and turn away from religion, nay may turn quite antagonistic to it.

Why does this happen? Let us analyze. What does man expect from religion, from being spiritual? If we send a depth-charge, of thought, into the motives that move man to any activity we will be able to explode the fact that desire for freedom and happiness lies at the root of all activity. Each one, however, thinks that happiness will be his if he obtained but a particular object, attained a particular goal. Thence arise all his efforts to possess the object or reach the goal. But it is not always a pleasant experience that awaits him on acquiring what he longs for. He finds that the object falls short of his ideal or what his imagination conjured it up to be; the goal seems to be paltry when it is neared and happiness seems to be as far off as ever, freedom appears to be as distant as when he started. Failing to attain anything nearest to freedom in the outside world some one directed his thought inward and cutting off all attractions realized that happiness and freedom lay in his own Self, which is the Spirit. We hear of it from the records left to us by these sages and are attracted towards it. The picture that is painted of the man of realization is glorious, almost alluring. Lured by this pen-picture some either after or before seeking happiness in other directions come to religion; religion not

as the common man understands it, i.e. as a denomination, a sect, a community, a belief in certain creeds and dogmas and nothing more, but something which speaks of a higher entity which is not bound by these labels.

However, prone as he is to sloth, expectant as he is of easy success, man meets with a hard taskmaster here, in religion. So the efforts which he himself considers as Herculean do not enable him to make any headway in spiritual life. The reasons are not far to seek. First of all, there is a tendency in man to overvalue his efforts. Even the laziest will find it a great burden and an unheard of attempt if he were asked to shift himself from one position to another.

Secondly, behind the efforts, there is not that real sincerity of purpose. We do not say that every one begins that way but there is every likelihood of man's losing the grit with which he started. To sustain the enthusiasm with which one starts any enterprise, even in the face of mountain high obstacles and impediments is a matter that few hearts are capable of. It is more so when the result is not tangible, not what can be perceived by the senses. Many get bogged down in their very first attempt and thenceforwards do not even try to extricate themselves from the situation.

Thirdly, the strong contrast that the religious life bears to the way of the world is an added reason. The two types are poles apart and there is no way of bridging them. It is this attempt to make a combination of these two paths, the *yoga* (spiritual) and *bhoga* (enjoyment), that makes a hash of spiritual life. Tulsidas, the famous poet-saint of North India, has said in a couplet of his, 'Where there is *kam* (desire) there cannot be *Ram* (God) and where *Ram* is there cannot be *kam* (desire)'. This statement of Tulsidas appears almost like a paraphrase of the Upanisadic texts: When all desires, that are residing in the heart of man, are destroyed then the mortal becomes immortal and here and now enjoys the bliss of Brahman'¹; and 'cut asunder are the knots of the heart, wiped away are all doubts, and destroyed are his *karmas* (the fruits of one's actions) when that Highest is seen.'² So it should be clear that it is a folly on the part of one who is in search of the ultimate good to combine these two paths.

II

Sages say that religion brings man eternal happiness and eternal freedom. Let us not mistake it as worldly happiness and freedom. A soul that has taken a body is bound and has to suffer pains. It is inevitable. True bliss, therefore, can only be in the non-temporal, transcendental Reality, which is the essence of man. Knowing this and being able to separate the Eternal Spirit from the body, with determination and

¹ Katha Upanishad, 6.14.

² Mundaka Up., 2.2.9.

courage, alone can make us joyful and liberated.³ The path is narrow and dangerous and calls for extreme caution and perseverance. The goal cannot be purchased by wealth nor can it be bartered for any other worldly entity. 'Neither by work, nor by progeny, nor by wealth but by renunciation alone some one attained immortality,'⁴ says the *Kaivalyopanishad*. 'Lust and lucre' as Sri Ramakrishna was never tired of repeating, is what stands in the way of man's attaining liberation. Renunciation of these is, therefore, incumbent on every practicant. It forms the keystone of the spiritual edifice.

We know how compellingly strong the attractions of the world are, how our mind is, as it were, soaked in them to the fullest extent; like a saturated solution it would not absorb anything more. This is specially the case of the present day youth. God has no place in their day's programme. We have to begin with such a mind. Of course, it would have been infinitely better to have a pure mind. But every one is not fortunate to possess an unsullied one. Again, purity of mind cannot be had for the asking, it requires cultivation, and purity cannot be cultivated by thinking more and more about the things of the world. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'As you move towards the east, the west will be left behind'. Likewise, when we move towards God the attractions of the world will loosen their grip on us. So this moving towards God is to be practised. We are apt to say: How can we with our sullied minds call on the Lord who is purity itself? To this there are counter questions. When will you begin then? How will you purify yourself? If we wait for all our impurities to be blown away before we start calling on God, we will be like the person who went to the sea to take a dip and waited for the waves to subside. Neither the waves subsided nor the person took his bath. So we have to begin the moment we feel that there is an entity which is eternal and can liberate us from our bonds. And in life the earlier we begin the better it is. For if we run in the old ruts for any length of time the furrows of habits will widen and run deeper and hold us down more and more firmly until at last we will sink into those habits altogether with no hope of redemption. As said earlier the two ways of life are diametrically opposed, so the farther you go on the worldly side the greater will have to be your exertion to retrace your steps. And man does not grow young always. Youth fades away yielding place to old age, when the faculties reach a moribund state. At that stage one cannot take to a new line of action, cannot strike out on a new path. Man is willy nilly driven along by the momentum of his old habits. All of us know how strong habits are; they are almost impossible to break through. Therefore, before they grow into our nature we have to discriminate and discard them when they are found to be a drag, a useless burden. A start along this higher path should somehow be done and then it is to be adhered to with utmost tenacity; then results will come. But results or no results the practicant should be undauntedly striving towards the goal without let or hindrance.

³ Kathopanishad, VI.17

⁴ Kaivalyopanishad, 1.3.

III

People call on God for various reasons. Some want wealth, some progeny, some help to tide over physical difficulties or mental worries. But few want Him for His own sake. That is what Sri Krishna declares in the *Gita*, 'Four types of people, who are of good merits, O Arjuna, worship Me: those who are in difficulty, those who are eager to know, those who are in need of something and the man of knowledge. Among them the man of knowledge being always united with Me and of one-pointed devotion excels. I am very dear to him and he is very dear to Me.'⁵ Undoubtedly those who take the name of God, believe in His existence and call upon Him are people with meritorious deeds to their credit but the man who does not know anything but God is the most loved by Him. Why? Because the first and the third type want to use God to their own ends. The second class simply wants to know about His Existence but the last class of devotees need Him for His own sake, and want Him as they need their very life breath. Those who reach such a state really worship God, others are only playing at it.

There is a dictum in Sanskrit, which forcefully brings out the idea of the above statement of Sri Krishna. 'Becoming like God one should worship Him.' When one's mind becomes as pure as purity itself then one's worship can be said to be worth the name. Such being the case we should ask ourselves as to what right we have to complain that we have not been able to achieve anything, that God has been cruel and so on.

The point now is how to purify this sullied mind. It is by trying to remember God, calling on Him always. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Hold on to the feet of God with one hand and do your work in the world with the other and when you are free from your duties hold on to Him with both your hands'. This is an injunction to remember Him always, even amidst our duties. Does not Sri Krishna similarly enjoin on Arjuna, 'remember Me at all times and fight'?⁶

This world is a battle-field where each one has to fight his own battle of life. As another man's taking food does not nourish us, so too another's struggle and efforts do not benefit us spiritually. It may be asked, 'What then about the vicarious suffering?' How many can do that? Only Incarnations of God and their apostles are able to do it. And the Incarnations come once in a while. Even then how many really come in contact with such personalities, how many really take shelter at their feet? Sri Krishna says, 'People, who are dull-witted, without knowing Me as the Lord of all creatures think little of Me who have taken this human form'.⁷ True, very few are able to recognize an Incarnation when he lives with us in the human form. We do not have that divine sight, we do not have that purity of the mind which reveals things as they really are.

⁵ Gita, 7.16-17.

⁶ Gita, 8-7.

⁷ Gita, 9-11.

Under such circumstances we have to struggle and work out our own way out of this labyrinth. Incessant practice of the spiritual disciplines along with a constant remembrance of God is the only method by which we can overcome our drawbacks.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Establish some relation with God: of a servant, of a child, of a friend, whichever suits your temperament. Make Him your own.' How much does not a mother love her children! The mother sacrifices her sleep and food to attend to the child when it is ailing, she takes infinite pains to attend to the smallest needs or comforts of her children. We have friends, real and good, whom we long to see; whose presence gives us joy. Again, a servant, true and faithful, will not mind even harsh words or treatment of his master. For he knows that at heart his master can have no ill-will towards him, as such he continues to discharge his duties as if nothing had happened between them. In a word his fidelity to his master remains constant and unshakable. By that the servant wins over his master's gratitude and grace. These are some of the human relationships which can be daily met with in our life. What is required of us is to cultivate one of these attitudes towards God. We can think of Him, as Sri Ramakrishna commended, as the Master and ourselves as His servants. For the Divine Master, who has planted compassion in the hearts of all beings, can He be less merciful? The human master may err but not the Divine. Sri Krishna assures that to us, 'Even the most wicked person, if he with one-pointed devotion, thinks of Me, should be considered as a person of exemplary character for he has rightly resolved. He is soon transformed into a righteous person and obtains eternal peace. Know it for certain, O son of Kunti, My devotee never perishes.'⁸

IV

We are not forlorn as long as we remember that there is One who has brought us into this world and who residing in us looks after our welfare. Perhaps, we may be afraid that he is watching us when we go wrong. That sense of fear also is good. For it will put a curb on our evil propensities, and help us cleanse our minds. In fact nothing escapes His perception, nothing is beyond His purview. He is the Indwelling Spirit in every one of us. How then can anything remain unknown to Him? Should we then tremble and fall down and weep and wail fearing the wrath of God? Of course, we must be ready to reap the fruits of our actions, good or evil. But weeping and wailing does not help if we do not mend our life. God like a loving mother forgives our faults and makes us strong to bear the burden of our actions, when it falls on us. He sees to it that we do not miserably sink down into despair. That is the result of calling on God. We shall be steadfast to Him, even though it means passing through fire and sword. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that we can see God if we call on Him with earnestness, with a yearning heart. He was wont to sing a song

⁸ Gita, 9.30-31.

expressive of this thought.

Cry to your Mother Śyama with a real cry, O Mind!
And how can She hold Herself from you? How can Śyama stay
away?

How can your Mother Kali hold Herself away?

Again, he said, 'God reveals Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions: the attraction of worldly possessions to the worldly man, the child's attraction for its mother, and the husband's attraction for the chaste wife.' When we reach this state we can be said to be really calling on God, nay living in Him. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, again, 'Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God.' But to have that longing is not a matter of a few years of discipline, it is a lifelong struggle. The path is long and arduous but a brave heart will never quail.

THE HUMAN MIND - ITS NATURE AND GOOD USE

Swami Paratparananda

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THE most perplexing organism, to a thinking man, is his own mind. We have deliberately used the word 'thinking' here to indicate a definite class of people, who are not satisfied with the natural trend of events and of life. People, generally, are not interested in taking note of the working of their own minds. That is: how the mind works? How it reacts to situations? Is the reaction conducive or not to future tranquillity? and so on. They concern themselves with the fulfilling of their immediate needs, in attending to their daily necessities anyhow, without caring to see whether it hurts others or not. To live a happy life, as they consider it, is all they desire and do. Normally people act within the bounds of the letter of the laws of the land though they may not respect the spirit behind them. Sometimes they cross the limit, and by clever stratagems escape the hand of justice. But cleverness is not wisdom. Wisdom is something different. Man may give the go-by to human laws sometimes but not his inherent ones. By clever manipulation he may evade the laws and amass money or enjoy other objects of the world but that will not give him peace of mind, because there will be lurking in his mind all the impressions (aroused or dormant) of the actions he has done.

The human mind is such a mechanism that it records everything that one takes interest in. For instance we may see many sights or meet a number of persons but the mind will record indelibly some scenes, some faces in which we get interested. Others are no more than vague, hazy, shadowy figures. Not only does the mind receive impressions but it stores them away. To borrow an expression of Swami Vivekananda, each impression is pigeon-holed and is revived or taken out for reference, as it were, when the experience is repeated, or when we meet again the person whom we had seen on a former occasion. And then we remember the experience or recall the person to our mind. This particular ability to recall an instance back to the mind is called memory. And memory forms

one of the *vrttis* of the *citta* (mindstuff)¹ according to the Indian psychologist Patanjali. It forms a part of the subconscious mind, if we are to speak in the language of the Western psychologists. We all know what a wonderful gift this memory is. Everyone has this faculty in smaller or greater measure. Without memory man would be a strange, pitiable being. As an illustration of this we can cite people who either due to great mental shocks or concussion of the brain in accidents suffer from amnesia permanently or for a time.

This subconscious mind plays a very great part in human life. Perhaps this statement may not be readily accepted by one and all. A little discussion may help to remove doubts regarding its veracity. We think we are acting consciously in the waking state. Very few do that. The majority of people are moved by their impulses, their habits and tendencies which are imbedded in the subconscious. We can observe our own minds to verify the phenomenon. In spite of our best efforts to the contrary we are forced to do certain actions which we know are harmful to our well-being — actions of which we in our saner moments are likely to regret, nay be ashamed of. And this will happen not once but repeatedly. And every time, perhaps, we may resolve that we would not be doing it again. But when the impulse comes, when the desire arises all our control slips away like water from a sieve.

Sri Krishna, with great pathos, says in the *Gita*, 'As per one's nature even a man of knowledge acts. Creatures follow their own nature. What will mere prohibition do?'² Wise counsel has no effect at that time. Men do evil actions or think evil thoughts when they are wide awake, conscious of what they are doing, yet they do not do them with all their heart, a slight heartache persists, the pricking of the conscience remains. Remorse, regret and shame set in afterwards. Does this not show that people are mostly moved by their subconscious mind?

Further, how much of our life do we live in the present? Much of it is spent in ruminating over our past or planning for the future while the present slips by every moment. Well did Pascal, the French mathematician and philosopher, say: 'Let any man examine his thoughts, and he will find them ever occupied with the past or the future. We scarcely think at all of the present; or if we do, it is only to borrow the light which it gives for regulating the future. The present is never our object; the past and the present we use as means; the future only is our end. Thus, we never live, we only hope to live'.

Whatever may be the other implications of this saying of Pascal, it

¹ Yoga Sutras, 5 & 6.

² Bhagavad Gita, III.33.

also conclusively brings forth the fact that the subconscious has no mean contribution to make in the shaping of man's life and character, and hence cannot be overlooked, neglected. In fact the psychoanalysts have more to do with the subconscious mind of their patients than the conscious. They have somehow to ferret out the causes of the nervous tensions of the patients in order to know what suggestions they can make for their removal.

II

It is important to note here, at this stage, that every thought, word or act of man goes to form his tendencies, impressions, *samskara*, in the subconscious. Man comes into this world with a load of *samskaras*. As Swami Vivekananda categorically points out, a child does not come into this world with what some of the earlier Western philosophers called the *tabula rasa*, a blank slate. 'Such a child,' he continues, 'would never attain to any degree of intellectual power, because he would have nothing to which to refer his new experiences. We see that the power of acquiring knowledge varies in each individual, and this shows that each one of us has come with his own fund of knowledge.' Another reason that Swamiji adduces to the existence of these impressions is that 'knowledge can only be got in one way, the way of experience; there is no other way to know. If we have not experienced it in this life, we must have experienced it in other lives'. He then proceeds to cite the example of the fear of death which is everywhere: 'A little chicken is just out of an egg and an eagle comes, and the chicken flies in fear to its mother'. It had had that experience in the past. So also with other feelings. A young one of a duck though hatched by a hen runs into water as soon as it gets near a pond. Each one of us has many such imprints in our mind and it is the sum total of these impressions that forms man's nature, *prakrti*.

We have now a fair idea why it is so important to control our thoughts, speech and actions. For they are going to shape our future. As a poet sings:

Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.

Like shadow the impressions of past acts will stalk us all our life and there is no escape from them. That being so we have to be cautious in our acts. We now know how formidable is the task set for us to fit ourselves to a religious life. But there is a silver lining to the dark clouds.

If the tendencies with which a person is born are good and the environment provided for his growth is conducive to spiritual well-being, the momentum of these tendencies will carry him a long way and a little exertion will meet with great success. But this fortune, good luck is given to a few. Others have to earn everything by the sweat of their brow. We are speaking here in the language of the worldly man. For in fact, as Swami Vivekananda remarks, 'No one can get any thing unless he earns it. We are responsible for what we are'. If, therefore, we see disparity in the world we should remember that it is not due to any whimsical fiat of Providence but due to the earned merit or demerit of the beings that the differences are there.

What then about the rest of us? We have somehow gone wrong in our previous births. Is there no redemption? Is there no way out? These are the questions that will naturally come to one who is desirous of liberation. The Hindu scriptures never speak of eternal damnation. They say every one can reach the Highest provided he patiently and ceaselessly applies himself to the task. And it is here again that the subconscious comes into the picture. As we have already observed, man's character is the aggregate of the impressions he carries within him. There is no chemical or physical process by which we could wipe out all imprints of our past actions however much we may wish for it. They have gone and formed into brick or mortar in the edifice of our character. But we can build again, as Swamiji asserts, 'And what we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves'.

How can we remake ourselves? We have noticed what happens when we pay heed to the promptings of the pleasurable sensations. We are drawn back and again into their unsatiable vortex, and then our discriminative mind is, as it were, put on the rack. It is torn between the intention to restrain and the lure of the siren senses. But the more you let loose the reins of the senses the more will they draw you down into the mire. Yet those who have had enough of all these pleasures will turn to something that is non-transient, something that is real and eternal. And to them Sri Ramakrishna suggests prayer to God as a remedy to overcome their baser nature.

Let us find how prayer helps. We get attached to things when we constantly come in touch with them either physically or mentally. Sometimes in the physical world the faults and defects of the things we love are visible and are likely to destroy the image that we had projected about them. On the other hand, the mind can construe images, of what we like, more perfect, ideal, and blemishless, inducing man to involve himself deeper and deeper with the attractions. Now, when we pray to

God, sincerely, not for the things of the world but to reveal Himself, our mind is taken off the object on which we dote. And as long as we pray the mind is flooded with the vibrations of the Divine. When this process is repeated constantly the mind naturally rests in God. By repeated practice one is able to inundate the mind with the consciousness of God. What happens is nothing extraordinary, nothing unusual. The mind which was being disturbed by various types of waves is now subjected to a vibration of a particular kind and then faithful to its duty it goes on recording the ripples until other imprints become stale and wane.

How to turn the naturally sense-bound mind towards God? Let us ask ourselves whether even a trial of practice is so difficult. Do we not lose our most loved relations and friends by estrangement or death, yet recover from the shocks? Do we not become cheerful after a time? We do. We make new friends, attach ourselves to something else and go on living. Likewise let us estrange ourselves from the senses which pose as friends and yet betray us; let us turn our mind towards God, who is our own. He is the innermost essence of our being. 'No one who believed in God has come to grief;' sings a poet-saint of South India, 'it is those who did not have faith in Him that were ruined.' Sri Ramakrishna says that God is like the wish-fulfilling tree. Whatever you ask for will be given to you. Why then should it be impossible to turn our mind towards Him, a little at least? In this instance alone do we have to consciously struggle. We are to undermine the baser inclinations, which have taken root in our subconscious. The mind should be trained to forget its old friends and cultivate new ones. The furrows that have been dug should be smothered by the newly ploughed ones.

Pray to God a hundred and a thousand times mentally, and forcibly make the mind accept it and then the subconscious will take it up. Once that part of the mind absorbs a theme it goes on recording the idea all the unconscious hours of our time. Thus we create a new habit. This is remaking of man. Only those people who can remake themselves, live a man's life, others are much like the dumb-driven cattle, slaves to their nature.

It should not however be taken to mean that the mind will immediately yield as soon as we begin to pray. It would definitely put up a stubborn fight. But we should not despair. Sri Krishna advises Arjuna, 'As and when the fickle and unsteady mind wanders away should it be brought back repeatedly and placed under the control of the Atman'.³ Pascal, perhaps, had this struggle and assertion of the inner man in view when he made the statement about living, quoted earlier. How long

³ Ibid., VI.26.

should this struggle go on? 'Till one falls asleep and till one's last breath, should one pass one's days in the contemplation of Vedanta', says a sage. What has been said about Vedanta can be said of the other practices also. The practices may be trying but there is no shorter road to immortality and if we have manliness we must stick on. The assertion of the higher nature over the baser one, according to Sri Ramakrishna, is real manliness. Jesus said, 'For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'⁴ Truly there is nothing which can be compared with the soul.

III

As in the case of prayer so also in the case of good actions the subconscious remoulds itself. Engaged in good acts the mind is forced to be occupied with good thoughts and as such keeps away, as far as possible, the lurking robbers (evil characteristics). But the way of motiveless action, the Karma Yoga is a difficult path. We may like to do unselfish action, make a good start too, but desire for results, in the last instance the desire for name and fame, somehow puts forth its stealthy shoot and in no time grows into a mighty banyan tree. That is the reason why it is expedient to have recourse to prayer and surrender to God along with the performance of unmotivated actions. Sri Shankara, with his far insight into the nature of things, had probably observed the drawbacks in the performance of mere rituals, when he declared, 'Karmas are for the purification of the mind and not for the attainment of the goal. Even millions of rituals without meditation on the Atman can give us no peep into the Highest'.⁵ We are apt to miss the point made out by Sri Shankara if we lay stress only on the second part of his statement. He has recognized the value and place of *karma*, in the purification of the mind, of sublimating the thoughts. Purity of mind is a great boon and if it is attained it is a great achievement. For a person of pure mind the goal is not far off.

When is the mind said to be pure? When there are no desires, no hankerings, no attachments whatsoever lurking in it and when it naturally rests in God. If we analyze the impurities of the mind — they are many we shall be able to trace back their origin to one single feeling, desire. Arjuna asks this pertinent question of Sri Krishna: 'Impelled by what does man, though unwillingly, engage himself in wicked actions as if compelled

⁴ Gospel according to St. Mathew, 16.25.

⁵ Vivekachudamani, 11.

by force?⁶ Sri Krishna's reply brings us to the same conclusion: 'This desire, this anger which is the product of *rajoguna*, is a voracious eater, and a great sinner. Know that to be the greatest enemy here (in this world)'.⁷ It is a significant statement. Sri Sankara commenting on this sloka of the *Gita* says: 'This desire, because of which there result every kind of misery, is the enemy of all. This desire of the creatures when obstructed results in anger and therefore anger also is only desire in another form'.⁸ Every one of our passions, in the ultimate analysis we will find, has originated with this desire. Therefore, becoming desireless, not for a time or for a day, but for ever, is to be pure in mind. For a person of pure mind the light of the Atman is ever present; as such, action when done without motive, though not directly, leads us towards the Highest.

IV

The method of psychic control also indicates how the mind has much to do with our religious life. 'The mind alone, for man, is the cause for bondage and emancipation — the mind which is engrossed in sense objects makes for bondage whereas when it is not entangled in them takes us to *moksha*',⁹ says one of the minor Upanishads.

From the foregoing we might have had some idea of the value of the mind. It is a great treasure. It now depends upon each person to what use he puts it. He may squander it away in false pursuits or utilize it in noble endeavours. Only he should keep in mind that his reward too will be according to his desert, that he will have to lie on the bed he has made.

No one can force anyone into any path, especially so into the right one. The utmost that can be done is to show the dangers underlying the journey on the wrong road and the peace that is awaiting on the right one and leave the choice to the pilgrim. That is what Sri Krishna said to Arjuna after teaching him the whole of the *Gita*. 'I have taught you all this knowledge, which is subtler than the subtlest. Pondering deep over their meaning do as you wish.'¹⁰ Let us too think whether we will give the mind free reins to move along the roads of the senses or turn it on the Atman, on God. If we choose the latter course it will be the best use we will be making of it.

⁶ Gita, III. 36.

⁷ IBID., III.37.

⁸ Shankara's commentary.

⁹ Amrita Bindu Upanishad.

¹⁰ Gita, XVIII.63.